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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

The Amazing Adventures of a Modern Lochinvar

"Eastward Ho!"

by William MacLeod Raine

Author of "One Who Was Afraid," "The Pirate *of* Panama," *etc.*

Between the Eyes!

OF a sudden, two glittering bright eyes shine in the inky darkness. Somewhere behind them, a huge body shapes itself and crouches for the spring.

Up comes your Iver Johnson. A quick aim—a pull of the trigger—and the bullet is sped straight as a streak of light between the eyes.

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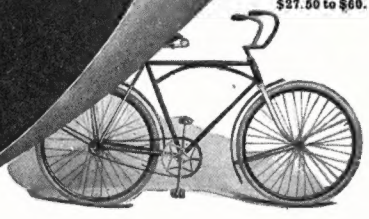

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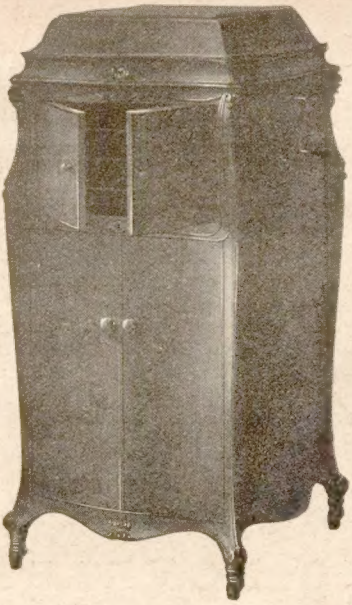

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CII — NUMBER 3

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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Ladies' 3-Piece Outfit

Smart Silk Poplin Skirt

Handsome Flounced Petticoat

Lace Trimmed Voile Waist

Send Only

$1.00 Down

Look at the wonderful value in this handsome, useful, fashionable ladies' outfit that we will send you on approval for only $1.00 down. If you decide to keep it, pay in small monthly sums you will never miss. You don't run the slightest risk. If for any reason whatever you decide to send the outfit back your money will be returned instantly without a question. But you must act NOW. We are offering this bargain only for a limited time. Don't wait. Send the coupon today.

The skirt is made of genuine Susquehanna Silk Poplin, noted for its beauty and long wearing quality. It is designed with a wide belt effect of self material. The novel pockets have fashionable rich silk fringe trimming and pearl buttons. Colors: Navy Blue or Black. Belt 22 to 32 inches. Length 35 to 40 inches.

Waist is of a dainty fine quality white voile in pretty fashionable design with pin tucks in front, lace trimmed soft collar and handsome embroidery. A charming waist in a most becoming style that will give excellent wear. White only. Bust size, 34 to 44.

Petticoat is of black mercerized sateen with handsome, richly pleated flounce and patented waistband. An excellently made garment of fine quality that will be most useful and long wearing.

Give color of skirt, also bust, belt, hip and length measurements. **Order by No. E-40. Terms: $1.00 with coupon; $1.85 monthly. Total price, $11.95** (*Terms are for entire outfit*).

Six Months to Pay

Think of it. Only six cents a day—three postage stamps—gives you this handsome 3-piece outfit. Order now on our liberal credit terms. No need to pay cash down to get latest styles and amazing values in anything you wish to wear. We trust honest people no matter where they live. We give you six whole months to pay. Not a penny's charge for the credit. There's no discount for cash. All business men use their credit. Use yours, too. Don't miss this chance.

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Dept. T9077, **W. 35th St., Chicago**

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Color of Skirt..... Bust size for Waist..... Skirt sizes Belt.....Hip.....Length.....

If for any reason I wish to return the outfit after examination I may do so and every cent I have paid will be returned instantly without question. Otherwise, I will pay the advertised price, $11.95, on your terms of $1.00 with coupon, balance $1.85 monthly.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

If you wish our Free Book of Bargains in Women's, Men's and Boys' Clothing, mark X here ☐

Order Now

Send the coupon now. All clothing material is harder and harder to get. We have only a limited quantity of these outfits. Don't delay. People all over the country will want them. First come, first served. Mail the coupon today with a $1.00 P. O. order, or a dollar bill. You take no risk. Send the coupon now.

Elmer Richards Co.

Dept. T9077, **West 35th St. Chicago**

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

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The Argosy Comb'n: The Argosy . . . / All-Story Weekly.	1.75	

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"A New Force In Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

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BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. Maher made $597.50 in June; Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days. $2500.00 a year profit for four average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y-119, Dayton, Ohio.

$65.00 A WEEK AND YOUR SUIT FREE— If you take advantage of our startling offer. Write us at once, and we will send you a full line of samples and everything necessary to start at once, absolutely free, postage prepaid. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. 1193, Chicago.

AGENTS—STEADY INCOME. LARGE MANUFACTURER OF HANDKERCHIEFS and Dress Goods, etc., wishes representative in each locality. Factory to consumer. Big profits, honest goods. Whole or spare time. Credit given. Send for particulars. Freeport Manufacturing Co., 38 Main Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Don't accept agency until you get particulars regarding Bero Tablets. 400% profit. Customers excited. Agents coining money. Prohibition assures quick sales. Wonderful opportunity. Write quick. Particulars free; sample 25c. Bero Co., 545½ No. Dearborn, Chicago.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. SELL MENDETS, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

AGENTS—YOU CAN GET A BEAUTIFUL FAST COLOR ALL WOOL "MADE-TO-MEASURE" SUIT without a cent of expense. Write Lincoln Woolen Mills Company, Dept. 25, Chicago, Ill., for their liberal suit offer.

AGENTS—$40 TO $100 A WEEK. FREE SAMPLES. Gold and silver Sign Letters for stores and office windows. Anyone can put them on. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431-H, N. Clark, Chicago.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

SIDE-LINE SALESMEN—WE HAVE AN ATTRACTIVE LINE of premium assortments for live salesmen. Commission from $5.00 to $20.00 per order. If you want an up-to-date line, write today. Canfield Manufacturing Company, 4003 Broadway Street, Chicago, Ill.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

Easy Sellers—Money Makers—Business Builders—Egg Conserve, Food Flavors, Toilet Preparations. All Repeaters. We manufacture, sell consumers direct through special agents. Outfit free to workers. Fletcher Production Co., 307 S. Clinton, Chicago.

INSYDE TYRES—Inner Armor For Auto Tires. Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blow outs. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

WANTED—SALESMAN—Side or Main Line—To sell low priced guaranteed tires. Good money making proposition for live wire. Write. Consolidated Auto Tire Outlet Company, 618 So. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: BIG PAY AND FREE AUTOMOBILE introducing wonderful new gasoline saver, punctureproof, five year spark plugs and other economical auto necessities. Outfit free. L. Ballwey, Dept. 57, Louisville, Ky.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD FARM LANDS. In Michigan's Best Hardwood Counties. Only $15 to $30 per acre. Easy monthly terms. Big money in potatoes, beans, clover, alfalfa, grains, fruit, poultry and stock. 10 to 160 acres. No swamps or stones. Good schools, churches, markets, climate, fishing and hunting. Free farm advisers and free insurance. Money loaned to build and to buy livestock. Write today for free booklet from largest land company. Established 1898. Swigart Land Company, Y1245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

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$100.00 A WEEK! We want one well acquainted, ambitious representative in every town to demonstrate and sell a wonderful new tire which sells on sight. Guaranteed 6,000 miles puncture-proof. Over-size, easier riding, better looking, and yet they cost only about half as much. We help you establish a substantial, flourishing business of your own, the weekly profits from which will amaze you. We show you how and give you every help. If you are ambitious to build a business of your own and are now making less than $100.00 a week, wire or write for free particulars at once. Mr. Auger, Sales Manager, 221 Second Street, San Francisco, Calif.

LIBERTY PORTRAITS BIG WINNERS. Thirty days credit. 36 hour service. Rejects credited. World's Famous Peace Paintings now ready. Easy $100 weekly. Write quickly for catalog and free samples. Consolidated Portrait Company, Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams Street, Chicago.

SALES AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY COUNTY TO GIVE ALL OR SPARE TIME. Position worth $750 to $1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

DAVIS' LUCKY 'LEVEN SELLING BETTER THAN EVER. $3.35 value sells for $1.25. Mrs. Lewis sold 280 in 7½ days—profit $200. "37" varieties of other big winners—150%-250% profit. Great crew managers' proposition. E. M. Davis, Dept. 58, Chicago.

AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat. Not sold in stores. Two coats in one. Something brand new. Saves the price of expensive overcoat. Guaranteed waterproof or money back. Big seller. Emil Thor made $134 in one week. We manufacture and make to measure. No capital required. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., 606 Rue Street, Dayton, Ohio.

$3.50 PER DAY PAID ONE MAN OR WOMAN IN EACH TOWN to distribute free circulars for Economy Non-Alcoholic Flavoring. Permanent position. F. E. Barr Co., 607 Lowell Building, Chicago.

NEW WINDSHIELD CLOTH Solves Baffling Problem. One wipe cleans rain-blurred windshield. Stays clear 24 hours. Motorists amazed. Agents getting rich. 300% profit. Exclusive territory. Cabco Co., Toledo, Ohio.

MEN OPERATING DOUGHBOY DOUGHNUT PORTABLE COOKING-SELLING STANDS earn $25 to $50 daily. Beautiful stands $95 on trial. Talbot Mfg. Co., 125, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS — WATERPROOF KITCHEN APRON. Needs no laundering. Every housewife buys. Dainty, durable, economical. Big money. Sample free. Thomas Co., 2107 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

DON'T ACCEPT AN AGENCY before getting our new premium selling plan. We circularize prospects in your name Free. $5.00 to $20.00 daily. Beauti Toilet Preparations. Outfit free to workers. Write Alfalfa, 800 Northwestern Bldg., Chicago.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN to sell your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 5,000,000 readers of The Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

BRANCH MANAGER WANTED by old established Chicago concern. We furnish full stock of goods, advertising matter, and equip store completely, in good location, all at our expense. We allow you to draw out $175 a month and will also pay you liberal share of the profits your store earns. Work may be started in spare time. No investment or previous experience necessary. If you are a hustler and want an opportunity to make $5,000 or more a year, we want you, and will pay you well from the start. Send your application today. S. Levy, Manager Dept. 651, 329 S. Franklin Street, Chicago, Ill.

Classified Advertising Continued on Page 6.

The Secret of Being a Convincing Talker

How I Learned It in One Evening

By GEORGE RAYMOND

"HAVE you heard the news about Frank Jordan?"

This question quickly brought me to the little group which had gathered in the center of the office. Jordan and I had started with the Great Eastern Machinery Co., within a month of each other, four years ago. A year ago Jordan was taken into the accounting division and I was sent out as salesman. Neither of us was blessed with an unusual amount of brilliancy, but we "got by" in our new jobs well enough to hold them.

Imagine my amazement, then, when I heard:

"Jordan's just been made Treasurer of the Company!"

I could hardly believe my ears. But there was the "Notice to Employees" on the bulletin board, telling about Jordan's good fortune.

Now I knew that Jordan was a capable fellow, quiet and unassuming, but I never would have picked him for any such sudden rise. I knew, too, that the Treasurer of the Great Eastern had to be a big man, and I wondered how in the world Jordan landed the place.

The first chance I got I walked into Jordan's new office and after congratulating him warmly, I asked him to let me "in" on the details of how he jumped ahead so quickly. His story is so intensely interesting that I am going to repeat it as closely as I remember.

"I'll tell you just how it happened, George, because you may pick up a pointer or two that will help you.

"You remember how scared I used to be whenever I had to talk to the chief? You remember how you used to tell me that every time I opened my mouth I put my foot into it, meaning of course that every time I spoke I got into trouble? You remember when Ralph Sinton left to take charge of the Western office and I was asked to present him with the loving cup the boys gave him, how flustered I was and how I couldn't say a word because there were people around? You remember how confused I used to be every time I met new people? I couldn't say what I wanted to say when I wanted to say it; and I determined that if there was any possible chance to learn how to talk I was going to do it.

"The first thing I did was to buy a number of books on public speaking, but they seemed to be meant for those who wanted to become orators, whereas what I wanted to learn was not only how to speak in public but how to speak to individuals under various conditions in business and social life.

"A few weeks later, just as I was about to give up hope of ever learning how to talk interestingly, I read an announcement stating that Dr. Frederick Houk Law had just completed a new course in business talking and public speaking entitled 'Mastery of Speech.' The course was offered on approval without money in advance, so since I had nothing whatever to lose by examining the lessons, I sent for them and in a few days they arrived. I glanced through the entire eight lessons, reading the headings and a few paragraphs here and there, and in about an hour the whole secret of effective speaking was opened to me.

"For example, I learned why I had always lacked confidence, why talking had always seemed something to be dreaded whereas it is really the simplest thing in the world to 'get up and talk.' I learned how to secure complete attention to what I was saying and how to make everything I said interesting, forceful and convincing. I learned the art of listening, the value of silence, and the power of brevity. Instead of being funny at the wrong time, I learned how and when to use humor with telling effect.

"But perhaps the most wonderful thing about the lessons were the actual examples of what things to say and when to say them to meet every condition. I found that there was a knack in making oral reports to my superiors. I found that there was a right way and a wrong way to present complaints, to give estimates, and to issue orders.

"I picked up some wonderful pointers about how to give my opinions, about how to answer complaints, about how to ask the bank for a loan, about how to ask for extensions. Another thing that struck me forcibly was that, instead of antagonizing people when I didn't agree with them, I learned how to bring them around to my way of thinking in the most pleasant sort of way. Then, of course, along with those lessons there were chapters on speaking before large audiences, how to find material for talking and speaking, how to talk to friends, how to talk to servants, and how to talk to children.

"Why, I got the secret the very first evening and it was only a short time before I was able to apply all of the principles and found that my words were beginning to have an almost magical effect upon everybody to whom I spoke. It seemed that I got things done instantly, where formerly, as you know, what I said 'went in one ear and out of the other.' I began to acquire an executive ability that surprised me. I smoothed out difficulties like a true diplomat. In my talks with the chief I spoke clearly, simply, convincingly. Then came my first promotion since I entered the accounting department. I was given the job of answering complaints, and I made good. From that I was given the job of making collections. When Mr. Buckley joined the Officers' Training Camp, I was made Treasurer. Between you and me, George, my salary is now $7,500 a year and I expect it will be more from the first of the year.

"And I want to tell you sincerely, that I attribute my success solely to the fact that I learned how to talk to people."

******

When Jordan finished, I asked him for the address of the publishers of Dr. Law's Course and he gave it to me. I sent for it and found it to be exactly as he had stated. After studying the eight simple lessons I began to sell to people who had previously refused to listen to me at all. After four months of record breaking sales during the dullest season of the year, I received a wire from the chief asking me to return to the home office. We had quite a long talk in which I explained how I was able to break sales records—and I was appointed Sales Manager at almost twice my former salary. I know that there was nothing in me that had changed except that I had acquired the ability to talk where formerly I simply used "words without reason." I can never thank Jordan enough for telling me about Dr. Law's Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking. Jordan and I are both spending all our spare time making public speeches on war subjects and Jordan is being talked about now as Mayor of our little Town.

So confident is the Independent Corporation, publishers of "Mastery of Speech," Dr. Law's Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking, that once you have an opportunity to see in your own home how you can, in one hour, learn the secret of speaking and how you can apply the principles of effective speech under all conditions, that they are willing to send you the Course on free examination.

Don't send any money. Merely mail the coupon or write a letter, and the complete Course will be sent, all charges prepaid, at once. If you are not entirely satisfied send it back any time within five days after you receive it and you will owe nothing.

On the other hand, if you are as pleased as are the thousands of other men and women who have used the Course, send only $5 in full payment. You take no risk and you have everything to gain, so mail the coupon now before this remarkable offer is withdrawn.

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Independent Corporation

Publishers of The Independent Weekly

Dept. L-3311, 119 West 40th Street, New York

Please send me Dr. Frederick Houk Law's "Mastery of Speech," a Course in Business Talking and Public Speaking in eight lessons. I will either remail the Course to you within five days after its receipt, or send you $5 in full payment of the Course.

Name.....

Address.....

.....All-St. & Arg.—10-11-19.

Classified Advertising Continued from Page 4.

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MISCELLANEOUS

LUMINOUS HOUSE NUMBERS—EASILY READ AT A DISTANCE on the darkest night; a modern necessity. Be the first on your street. Any figures or letters, 25c each. Special artistic design, 50c each. Luminous Sign Co., Stillwater, Minn.

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PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

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STAMPS—12 DIFFERENT FROM WARRING NATIONS. 10 cents; 10 different foreign coins, 25 cents; 10 Uruguay Stamps, 10 cents. Lists free. We buy old stamps. Buying list, 10 cents. Toledo Stamp Co., Toledo, Ohio.

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NEW, REBUILT AND SLIGHTLY USED TYPEWRITERS $8 up. Portable machines $10 up. Write for our Catalog 26-S. Beran Typewriter Co., 58 W. Washington St., Chicago.

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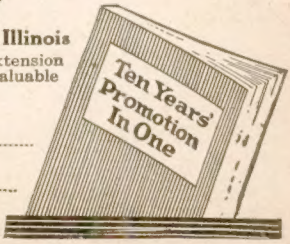

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY
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"Eastward Ho!"

by William MacLeod Raine

Author of "One Who Was Afraid," "The Pirate of Panama," "Men in the Raw," etc.

NEXT to the army, which shows up men like a shower shows up a "hand-me-down," there is no better test of character than the challenge of a big city. New York has proved as many souls as the battle-fields of France. Under the kindly hand of sun and sky, and the daily sight of the face of the fields or the sweep of the prairies, most men follow the bent of their higher nature. Fling them into the fierce arena of the city, where the command is sink or swim, is it any wonder that only sterling worth can withstand the ground swell and the pygmies are carried under? Clay Lindsay, a bronzed ranchman from Arizona, dropped the dress but not the soul of the West when he hit the Gay White Way. Gallantly he threw his hat into the metropolitan ring, and New York accepted the challenge. Drama was bound to ensue, and the first act of this absorbing "show-down" is graphically recounted in the first part of Raine's big, six-part serial, which opens this week's magazine.

FOREWORD.

THE driver of the big car throttled down. Since he had swung away from the dusty road to follow a wagon track across the desert the speedometer had registered many miles. His eyes searched the ground in front to see whether the track led up the brow of the hill or dipped into the sandy wash.

On the breeze there floated to him the faint, insistent bawl of thirsty cattle. The car leaped forward again, climbed the hill, and closed in upon a remuda of horses watched by two wranglers.

The chauffeur stopped the machine and shouted a question at the nearest rider, who swung his mount and cantered up. He was a lean, tanned youth, in overalls, jumper, wide sombrero, high-heeled boots, and shiny leather chaps. A girl in the tonneau appraised with quick, eager eyes this horseman of the plains. Perhaps she found him less picturesque than she had hoped. He was not there for moving-picture purposes. Nothing on horse or man held its place for any reason except utility. The leathers protected the legs of the boy from the spines of the cactus and the thorns of the mesquite, the wide flap of the hat his face from the slash of cat-claws when he drove headlong through the brush after flying cattle. The steel horn of the saddle was built to check a half ton of bolting hill

steer and fling it instantly. The rope, the Spanish bit, the tapaderas, all could justify their place in his equipment.

"Where's the round-up?" asked the driver.

The coffee-brown youth gave a little lift of his head to the right. He was apparently a man of few words. But his answer sufficed. The bawling of anxious cattle was now loud and persistent.

The car moved forward to the edge of the mesa and dropped into the valley. The girl in the back seat gave a little scream of delight. Here at last was the West she had read about in books and seen on the screen.

This was cattleland's hour of hours. The *parada* grounds were occupied by two circles of cattle, each fenced by eight or ten horsemen. The nearer one was the beef herd, beyond this—and closer to the mouth of the cañon from which they had all recently been driven—was a mass of closely packed cows and calves.

The automobile swept around the beef herd and drew to a halt between it and the noisier one beyond. In a fire of mesquite wood branding irons were heating. Several men were busy branding and marking the calves dragged to them from the herd by the horsemen who were roping the frightened little blatters.

It was a day beautiful even for Arizona. The winy air called potently to the youth in the girl. Such a sky, such atmosphere, so much life and color! She could not sit still any longer. With a movement of her wrist she opened the door and stepped down from the car.

A man sitting beside the chauffeur turned in his seat. "You'd better stay where you are, honey." He had an idea that this was not exactly the scene a girl of seventeen ought to see at close range.

"I want to get the kinks out of my muscles, dad," the girl called back. "I'll not go far."

She walked along a ridge that ran from the mesa into the valley like an outstretched tongue. Her hands were in the pockets of her fawn-colored coat. There was a touch of unstudied jauntiness in the way the tips of her golden curls escaped from beneath the little brown toque she wore. A young man guarding the beef herd watched her curiously. She moved with the untamed, joyous freedom of a sun-worshiper just emerging from the morning of the world. Something in the poise of the light, girlish figure struck a spark from his imagination.

A vaquero was cantering toward the fire with a calf in his wake. Another cow-puncher dropped the loop of his lariat on the ground, gave it a little upward twist as the calf passed over it, jerked taut the riata, and caught the animal by the hind leg. In a moment the victim lay stretched on the ground. In the gathering gloom the girl could not quite make out what the men were doing. To her sensitive nostrils drifted an acrid odor of burned hair and flesh, the wail of an animal in pain. One of the men was using his knife on the ears of the helpless creature. She heard another say something about a crop and an under-bit. Then she turned away, faint and indignant. Three big men torturing a month-old calf—was this the brave outdoor West she had read about and remembered from her childhood days? Tears of pity and resentment blurred her sight.

As she stood on the spit of the ridge, a slim, light figure silhouetted against the sky line, the young man guarding the beef herd called something to her that was lost in the bawling of the cattle. From the motion of his hand she knew that he was telling her to get back to the car. But the girl saw no reason for obeying the orders of a range rider she had never seen before and never expected to see again. Nobody had ever told her that a rider is fairly safe among the wildest cattle, but a man on foot is liable to attack when a herd is excited.

She turned her shoulder a little more definitely to the man who had warned her and looked across the *parada* grounds to the hills swimming in a haze of violet velvet. Her heart throbbed to a keen delight in them, as it might have done at the touch of a dear friend's hand long absent. For she had been born in the Rockies. They belonged to her and she to them. Long years in New York had left her still an alien.

A shout of warning startled her. Above the bellowing of the herd she heard another yell.

"Hi-yi-ya-a!"

A red-eyed steer, tail up, was crashing through the small brush toward the branders. There was a wild scurry for safety. The men dropped iron and ropes and fled to their saddles. Deflected by pursuers, the animal turned. By chance it thundered straight for the girl on the sand spit.

She stood paralyzed for a moment.

Out of the gathering darkness a voice came to her sharp and clear. "Don't move!" It rang so vibrant with crisp command that the girl, poised for flight, stood still and waited in white terror while the huge steer lumbered toward her.

A cow pony wheeled as on a dollar, jumped to an instant gallop. The man riding it was the one who had warned her back to the car. Horse and *ladino* pounded over the ground toward her. Each stride brought them closer to each other as they converged toward the sand spit. It came to her with a gust of panicky despair that they would collide on the very spot where she stood. Yet she did not run.

The rider, lifting his bronco forward at full speed, won by a fraction of a second. He guided in such a way as to bring his horse between her and the steer. The girl noticed that he dropped his bridle rein and crouched in the saddle, his eyes steadily upon her. Without slackening his pace in the least as he swept past, the man stooped low, caught the girl beneath the armpits, and swung her in front of him to the back of the horse. The steer pounded past so close behind that one of its horns grazed the tail of the cow pony.

It was a superb piece of horsemanship, perfectly timed, perfectly executed.

The girl lay breathless in the arms of the man, her heart beating against his, her face buried in his shoulder. She was dazed, half fainting from the reaction of her fear. The next she remembered clearly was being lowered into the arms of her father.

He held her tight, his face tortured with emotion. She was the apple of his eye, and she had shaved death by a hair's breadth. A miracle had saved her, but he would never forget the terror that had gripped him. Naturally, shaken as he was, his relief found vent in scolding.

"I told you to stay by the car, honey. But you're so wilful. You've got to have your own way. Thank God you're safe. If—if—" His voice broke as he thought of what had so nearly been.

The girl snuggled closer to him, her arms round his neck. His anxiety touched her nearly, and tears flooded her eyes.

"I know, dad. I—I'll be good."

A young man descended from the car, handsome, trim, and well got up. He had been tailored by the best man's outfitter in New York. Nobody on Broadway could order a dinner better than he. The latest dances he could do perfectly. He had the reputation of knowing exactly the best thing to say on every occasion. Now he proceeded to say it.

"Corking bit of riding—never saw better. I'll give you my hand on that, my man."

The cow-puncher found a bunch of manicured fingers in his rough brown paw. He found something else, for after the pink hand had gone there remained a fifty-dollar bill. He looked at it helplessly for a moment; then, beneath the brown outdoor tan, a flush of anger beat into his face. Without a word he pressed the note into the mouth of the bronco.

The buckskin knew its master for a very good friend. If he gave it something to eat—well, there was no harm in trying it once. The buckskin chewed placidly for a few seconds, decided that this was a practical joke, and ejected from its mouth a slimy green pulp that had recently been a Treasury note.

The father stammered his thanks to the rescuer of the girl. "I don't know what I can ever do to let you know—I don't know how I can ever pay you for saving—"

"Forget it!" snapped the brown man curtly. He was an even-tempered youth, as genial and friendly as a half-grown pup, but just now the word "pay" irritated him as a red flag does a sulky bull.

"If there's anything at all I can do for you—"

"Not a thing."

The New Yorker felt that he was not expressing himself at all happily. What he wanted was to show this young fellow that he had put him under a lifelong obligation he could never hope to wipe out.

"If you ever come to New York—"

"I'm not liable to go there. I don't belong there any more than you do here. Better drift back to Tucson, stranger. The *parada* is no place for a tenderfoot. You're in luck you're not shy one lil girl trompled to death. Take a fool's advice and hit the trail for town *pronto* before you bump into more trouble."

The rider swung round his pony and cantered back to the beef herd.

He left behind him a much-annoyed clubman, a perplexed and distressed father, and a girl both hurt and indignant at his brusk rejection of her father's friendly advances. The episode of the fifty-dollar bill had taken place entirely under cover. The man who had given the note and the one who had refused to accept it were the only ones who knew of it. The girl saw only that this splendid horseman who had snatched her from under the very feet of the *ladino* had shown a boorish discourtesy. The savor had gone out of her adventure. Her heart was sick with disappointment and indignation.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT A STREET TWELVE MILES LONG.

"I LIKE yore outfit," Red Hollister grumbled. "You're nice boys, and good to yore mothers—what few of you ain't wore their gray hairs to the grave with yore frolicsome ways. You know yore business and you got a good cook. But I'm darned if I like this thing of two meals a day, one at a quarter to twelve at night and the other a quarter past twelve, also and likewise at night."

A tenderfoot might have thought that Hollister had some grounds for complaint. For weeks he had been crawling out of his blankets in the predawn darkness of 3 A.M. He had sat shivering down beside a camp-fire to swallow a hurried breakfast, and had swung into the saddle while night was still heavy over the land. He had ridden after cattle wild as deer, and had wrestled with *ladino* steers till long after the stars were up. In the chill night he had eaten another meal, rolled up in his blankets, and fallen into instant heavy sleep. And five minutes later—or so at least it seemed to him—the cook had pounded on the triangle for him to get up.

None the less, Red's grumbling was a pretense. He would not have been anywhere else for twice the pay. This was what he lived for.

Johnnie Green, commonly known as the Runt, helped himself to another flank steak. He was not much of a cow-hand, but when it came to eating, Johnnie was always conscientiously on the job.

"These here New Yorkers must be awful hardy," he ventured, apropos of nothing. "Seems like they're night birds for fair. Never do go to bed, far as I can make out. They tromp the streets all day and dance at them cabby-rets all night. My feet would be all wore out."

Stace Wallis grinned. "So would my pocketbook. I've heard tell how a fellow can pay as high as four or five dollars for an eat at them places."

"Nothing to it—nothing at all," pronounced Red dogmatically. Hollister always knew everything. Nothing in the heavens above or the earth below could stump him. The only trouble with his knowledge was that he knew so much that wasn't true. "Can't be did. Do you reckon any o' them New Yorkers could get away with five dollars' worth of ham and aigs? Why, the Runt here couldn't eat more 'n a dollar's worth."

"Sure," assented Johnnie. It was the habit of his life to agree with the last speaker. "You're damn whistlin', Red. Why, at the Harvey House they only charge a dollar for a square, and a man couldn't get a better meal than that."

"Wunst in Denver, when I went to the stockmen's convention, I blowed myself for a meal at the Cambridge Hotel that set me back one fifty," said Slim Leroy reminiscently. "They eat dinner at night."

"They do?" scoffed Johnnie. "Don't

they know a fellow eats dinner at noon and supper at night?"

"I ain't noticed any dinner at noon for se-ve-real weeks," Hollister contributed.

"Some feed that," ruminated Leroy, with memories of the Cambridge Hotel still to the fore.

"With or without?" questioned Red.

"I reckon I had one lil drink with it. No more."

"Then they stung you," pronounced Hollister.

"Mebbe so, and mebbe not. I ain't kickin' none. I sure was in tony society. There was fellows sitting at a table near us that had on them swallow-tail coats."

Johnnie ventured a suggestion. "Don't you reckon if a fellow ate a couple o' plates of this here cavi-eer stuff and some ice-cream and cake he might run it up to two bucks or two and a half? Don't you reckon he might, Clay?"

Clay Lindsay laughed. "You boys know a lot about New York; just about as much as I do. I've read that a guy can drop a hundred dollars a night in a cabaret if he has a friend or two along and never make a ripple on Broadway."

"Does that look reasonable to you, Clay?" argued Red. "We're not talking about bucking the tiger or buying diamonds for no actresses. We're figurin' on a guy going out with some friends to eat and take a few drinks and have a good time. How could he spend fifty dollars, let alone a hundred? If he let the skirts and the wheel alone and didn't tamper with no straight flushes."

"I'm telling you what I read. Take it or leave it," said Clay amiably.

"Well, I read there's a street there twelve miles long. If a fellow started at one end of that street with a thirst he'd sure be salivated before he reached the other end of it," Stace said with a grin.

"Wonder if a fellow could get a job there. They wouldn't have no use for a puncher, I reckon," Slim drawled.

"Betcha Clay could get a job all right," answered Johnnie Green promptly. "He'd be top-hand anywhere, Clay would."

Johnnie was the lost dog of the B-In-a-Box ranch. It was his nature to follow somebody and lick his hand whenever it was permitted. The somebody he followed was Clay Lindsay. Johnnie was his slave, the echo of his opinions, the booster of his merits. He asked no greater happiness than to trail in the wake of his friend and get a kind word occasionally.

The Runt had chosen as his Admirable Crichton a most engaging youth. It never had been hard for any girl to look at Clay Lindsay. His sun-tanned good looks, the warmth of his gay smile, the poise and the easy stride of him, made Lindsay a marked man even in a country where men of splendid physique were no exception.

"I'd take a lil bet that New York ain't lookin' for no champeen ropers or bronco busters," said Stace. "Now if Clay was a cabby-ret dancer or a Wall Street wolf—"

"There's no street in the world twelve miles long where Clay couldn't run down and hogtie a job if he wanted to," insisted Johnnie loyally. "Ain't that right, Clay?"

Clay was not listening. His eyes were watching the leap of the fire glow. The talk of New York had carried him back to a night on the round-up three years before. He was thinking about a slim girl standing on a sand spit with a wild steer rushing toward her; of her warm, slender body lying in his arms for five immortal seconds; of her dark, shy eyes shining out of the dusk at him like live coals. He remembered—and it hurt him to recall it—how his wounded pride had lashed out in resentment of the patronage of these New Yorkers. The younger man had insulted him, but he knew in his heart now that the girl's father had meant nothing of the sort. Of course, the girl had forgotten him long since. If he ever came to her mind as a fugitive memory it would be in the guise of a churlish boor, as impossible as his own hill cattle.

"Question is, could you land a job in New York if you wanted one," explained Stace to the dreamer.

"If it's neck meat or nothing, a fellow can most always get something to do," said Lindsay in the gentle voice he used. The vague impulses of many days crystallized suddenly into a resolution. "Anyhow I'm going to try. Just as soon as the rodeo is

over I'm going to hit the trail for the big town."

"Tucson?" inquired Johnnie dubiously.

"New York."

The bow-legged little puncher looked at his friend and gasped. Denver was the limit of Johnnie's imagination. New York was *terra incognita*, inhabited by a species who were as foreign to him as if they had dwelt in Mars.

"You ain't really aimin' to go to New York sure enough?" he asked.

Clay flashed on him the warm smile that endeared him to all his friends. "I'm going to ride down Broadway and shoot up the town, Johnnie. Want to come along?"

CHAPTER II.

CLAY APPOINTS HIMSELF CHAPERON.

AS he traveled east Clay began to slough the outward marks of his calling. He gave his spurs to Johnnie before he left the ranch. At Tucson he shed his chaps and left them in care of a friend at the Longhorn Corral. The six-gun with which he had shot rattlesnakes he packed into his suit-case at El Paso. His wide-rimmed felt hat flew off while the head beneath it was stuck out of a window of the coach somewhere south of Denver. Before he passed under the welcome arch in that city the silk kerchief had been removed from his brown neck and retired to the hip-pocket which formerly held his forty-five.

The young cattleman began to flatter himself that nobody could now tell he was a wild man from the hills who had never been curried. He might have spared himself the illusion. Everybody he met knew that this clean-cut young athlete with the heavy coat of tan on his good-looking face was a product of the open range. The lightness of his stride, the breadth of the well-packed shoulders, the frankness of the sky-blue eyes, all advertised him a son of Arizona.

It was just before noon at one of the small plains towns east of Denver that a girl got on the train and was taken by the porter to a section back of Clay Lindsay. The man from Arizona noticed that she was refreshingly pretty in an unsophisticated way.

A little later he had a chance to confirm this judgment, for the dining-car manager seated her opposite him at a table for two. When Clay handed her the menu card she murmured, "Thank you!" with a rush of color to her cheeks, and looked helplessly at the list in her hand. Quite plainly she was taking her first long journey.

"Do I have to order everything that is here?" she presently asked shyly after a tentative and furtive glance at her table companion.

Clay felt no inclination to smile at her naïveté. He was not very much more experienced than she was in such things, but his ignorance of forms never embarrassed him. They were details that seemed to him to have no importance.

The cow-puncher helped her fill the order card. She put herself entirely in his hands, and was willing to eat whatever he suggested, unbiased by preferences of her own. He included chicken salad and ice-cream. From the justice she did her lunch he concluded that his choice had been a wise one.

She was a round, soft little person, with constant intimations of childhood not long outgrown. Dimples ran in and out her pink cheeks at the slightest excuse. The blue eyes were innocently wide, and the Cupid's bow mouth invitingly sweet. The girl from Brush, Colorado, was about as worldly wise as a plump, cooing infant or a fluffy kitten, and instinctively the eye caressed her with the same tenderness.

During the course of lunch she confided that her name was Kitty Mason; that she was an orphan; and that she was on her way to New York to study at a school for moving-picture actresses.

"I sent my photograph and the manager wrote back that my face was one hundred per cent perfect for the movies," the girl explained.

It was clear that she was expecting to be manufactured into a film star in a week or two. Clay doubted whether the process was quite so easy, even with a young

woman who bloomed in the diner like a rose of the desert.

After they had finished eating, the range rider turned in at the smoking compartment and enjoyed a cigar. He fell into casual talk with an army officer who had served in the Southwest, and it was three hours later when he returned to his own seat in the car.

A hard-faced man in a suit of checks more than a shade too loud was sitting in the section beside the girl from Brush. He was making talk in an assured, familiar way, and the girl was listening to him shyly and yet eagerly. The man was a variation of a type known to Lindsay. That type was the Arizona bad man. If this expensively dressed fellow was not the Eastern equivalent of the Western gunman, Clay's experience was badly at fault. The fishy, expressionless eyes, the colorless face, the tight-lipped jaw, expressed a sinister personality and a dangerous one. Just now a suave good humor veiled the evil of him, but the cow-puncher knew him for a wolf none the less.

Clay had already made friends with the Pullman conductor. He drifted to him now on the search for information.

"The hard-faced guy with the little girl?" he asked casually after the proffer of a cigar. "The one with the muscles bulging out all over him—who is he?"

"He comes by that tough mug honestly. That's Jerry Durand."

"The prize-fighter?"

"Yep. Used to be. He's a gang leader in New York now. On his way back from the big fight in Frisco."

"He was some scrapper," admitted the range rider. "Almost won the championship once, didn't he?"

"Lost on a foul. He always was a dirty fighter. I saw him the time he knocked out Reddy Moran."

"What do you mean, gang leader?"

"He's boss of his district, they say. Runs a gambling house of his own, I've heard. You can't prove it by me."

When Lindsay returned to his place he settled himself with a magazine in a seat where he could see Kitty and her new friend. The very vitality of the girl's young life was no doubt a temptation to this man. The soft, rounded throat line, the oval cheek's rich coloring so easily moved to ebb and flow, the carmine of the full red lips; every detail helped to confirm the impression of a sensuous young creature, innocent as a wild thing of the forests and as yet almost as unspiritual. She was a child of the senses, and the man sitting beside her was weighing and appraising her with a keen and hungry avidity.

Durand took the girl in to dinner with him, and they sat not far from Lindsay. Kitty was lost to any memory of those about her. She was flirting joyously with a sense of newly awakened powers. The man from Graham County, Arizona, felt uneasy in his mind. The girl was flushed with life. In a way she was celebrating her escape from the narrow horizon in which she had lived. It was in the horoscope of her temperament to run forward gaily to meet adventure, but when the man opposite her ordered wine, and she sipped it reluctantly with a little grimace, the cow-puncher was of opinion that she was likely to get more of this adventure than was good for her. In her unsophistication danger lay, for she was plainly easily influenced, and in the beat of her healthy young blood probably there was latent passion.

They left the diner before Clay. He passed them later in the vestibule of the sleeper. They were looking out together on the moonlit plain through which the train was rushing. The arm of the man was stretched behind her to the railing, and with the motion of the car the girl swayed back slightly against him.

Again Clay sought the smoking compartment and was led into talk by the officer. It was well past eleven when he rose, yawned, and announced, "I'm goin' to hit the hay."

Most of the berths were made up, and it was with a little shock of surprise that his eyes fell on Kitty Mason and her new friend, the sleek, black head of the man close to her fair curls, his steady eyes holding her like a charmed bird, while his caressing voice wove the fairy tale of New

York, to which she yielded herself in strange delight.

"Don't you-all want yo' berth made up, lady?"

It was the impatient porter who interrupted them. The girl sprang up tremulously to accept.

"Oh, please. Is it late?" Her glance swept down the car and took in the fact that her section alone was not made up. "I didn't know—why, what time is it?"

"Most twelve, ma'am," replied the aggrieved porter severely.

She flashed a look of reproach at her companion and blushed again as she fled with her bag to the ladies' dressing-room. As for the man, Lindsay presently came on him in the smoking-room, where he sat with an unlit cigar between his teeth and his feet on a chair. Behind half-shuttered lids his opaque eyes glittered with excitement. Clearly he was reviewing in his mind the progression of his triumph, Clay restrained a good healthy impulse to pick a row with him and go to the mat with the ex-prize-fighter. But after all it was none of his business.

The train was rolling through the cornfields of the Middle West when the Arizonan awoke. He was up early, but not long before Kitty Mason, who was joined at once by Durand.

"Shucks! Nothing to it at all," the range rider assured himself. "That lil girl sure must have the number of this guy. She's flirtin' with him to beat three of a kind, but I'll bet a dogie she knows right where she's at."

Clay did not in the least believe his own argument. If he had come from a city he would have dismissed the matter as none of his business. But he came from the clean Southwest, where every straight girl is under the protection of every decent man. If she was in danger because of her innocence it was up to him to look after her. There was no more competent man in Graham County than Clay Lindsay, but he recognized that this was a delicate affair in which he must move warily.

On his way to the diner at noon the range rider passed her again. She was alone for the moment, and as she leaned back, her soft, round throat showed a beating pulse. Her cheeks were burning, and her starry eyes were looking into the future with a happy smile.

"You pore little maverick," the man commented silently.

The two had the table opposite him. As the wheels raced over a culvert to the comparative quiet of the ballasted track beyond, the words of the man reached Clay.

"And we'll have all day to see the city, kid."

Kitty shook her head. There was hesitation in her manner, and the man was quick to make the most of it. She wanted to stay; wanted to skip a train and let this competent guide show her Chicago. But somewhere, deep in her consciousness, a bell of warning was beginning to ring. Some uneasy prescience of trouble was sifting into her light heart. She was not so sure of her fairy tale, a good deal less sure of her prince.

A second time the song of the rails lifted from a heavy, rumbling bass to a lighter note, and again a snatch of words drifted across the diner.

"The time of your young life, honey."

The girl was crumbling a bread ball with her fingers as a vent to her restless excitement. The heavy hand of the man moved across the table and closed on hers. Clay did not catch the words that accompanied the caress.

But the long lashes of the girl lifted and her baby-blue eyes met his with shy reproach. "How can you say that?" she breathed, color sweeping her face in a vivid flame.

The chant of the wheels rose again, increased to a dull roar, and deadened the sound of all talk. But Lindsay knew the girl was weakening. She was no match for this big, dominant, two-fisted man.

The jaw of the cow-puncher set. This child was not fair game for a man like Durand. When Clay rose to leave the diner he knew that he meant to sit in and take a hand.

Either the limited was ahead of its time schedule or the engineer had orders to run into the city very slowly. The train was creeping through the thickly settled quar-

ter where the working people are herded, when Clay touched Durand on the shoulder.

"Like to see you a moment in the vestibule," he said in his gentle voice.

The eyes of the two men met, and the gambler knew at once that this man and he were destined to be enemies. Some sixth sense of safety, cultivated by a lifetime of battle, flashed him sure warning of this. The fellow meant to make trouble of some kind. The former near-champion of the ring had not the least idea what about or in what way. Nor did he greatly care. He had supreme confidence in his ability to look after himself. It was one factor of the stock in trade that had made him a dominant figure in the underworld of New York. He was vain enough to think that if it came to the worst there were few men living who could best him in a rough-and-tumble fight. Certainly no hillbilly from Arizona could do it.

No man had ever said that Jerry Durand was not game. He rose promptly and followed the Westerner from the car, swing along with the light, catlike tread acquired by many pugilists.

The floor of the vestibule had been raised, and the outer door of the car opened. Durand found time to wonder why.

The cow-puncher turned on him with an abrupt question. "Can you swim?"

The eyes of the ward boss narrowed. "What's that to you?" he demanded truculently.

"Nothing to me, but a good deal to you. I'm aimin' to drop you in the river when we cross."

"Is that so?" snarled Durand. "You're quite a joker, ain't you? Well, you can't start something too soon to suit me. But let's get this clear so we'll know where we're at. What's ailing you, rube?"

"I don't like the color of yore hair or the cut of yore clothes," drawled Lindsay. "You've got a sure enough bad eye, and I'm tired of traveling in yore company. Let's get off, me or you."

In the slitted eyes of the Bowery graduate there was no heat at all. They were bleak as a heavy winter morn. "Suits me fine. You'll not travel with me much farther. Here's where you beat the place."

The professional lashed out suddenly with his left. But Clay was not at the receiving end of the blow. Always quick as chain lightning, he had ducked and clinched. His steel-muscled arms tightened about the waist of the other. A short-arm jolt to the cheek he disregarded.

Before Durand had set himself to meet the plunge he found himself flying through space. The gambler caught at the rail, missed it, landed on the cinders beside the road-bed, was flung instantly from his feet, and rolled over and over down an incline to a muddy gully.

Clay, hanging to the brass railing, leaned out and looked back. Durand had staggered to his feet, plastered with mud from head to knees, and was shaking furiously a fist at him. The face of the man was venomous with rage.

The cow-puncher waved a debonair hand at him and mounted the steps again. The porter was standing in the vestibule looking at him with amazement.

"You throwed a man off'n this train, mistah," he charged.

"So I did," admitted Clay, and to save his life he could not keep from smiling.

The porter sputtered. This beat anything in his previous experience. "But—but—it ain't allowed to open up the cah. Was you-all havin' trouble?"

"No trouble at all. He bet me a cigar I couldn't put him off."

Clay palmed a dollar and handed it to the porter as he passed into the car. The eyes of that outraged official rolled after him. The book of rules did not say anything about wrestling matches in the vestibule. Besides, it happened that Durand had called him down sharply not an hour before. He decided to brush off his passengers and forget what he had seen.

Clay stopped in front of Kitty and said he hoped she would have no trouble making her transfer in the city. The girl was no fool. She had sensed the antagonism that had flared up between them in that moment when they had faced each other five minutes before.

"Where's Mr. Durand?" she asked.

"He got off."

"But the train hasn't stopped."

"It's just crawling along, and he was in a hurry."

Her gaze rested upon an angry bruise on his cheek. It had not been there when last she saw him. She started to speak, then changed her mind.

Clay seated himself beside her. "Chicago is a right big town, I reckon. If I can help you any, Miss Kitty, I'd be glad to do what I can."

The girl did not answer. She was trying to work out this puzzle of why a man should get off before the train reached the station.

"I'm a stranger myself, but I expect I can worry along somehow," he went on cheerfully.

"Mr. Durand didn't say anything to me about getting off," she persisted.

"He made up his mind in a hurry. Just took a sudden notion to go."

"Without saying anything about his suit-cases?"

"Never mentioned 'em."

"You didn't have—any trouble with him?" she faltered.

"Not a bit," he told her genially. "Sorry our tickets take us by different roads to New York. Maybe we'll meet up with each other there, Miss Kitty."

"I don't understand it," she murmured, half to herself. "Why would he get off before we reach the depot?"

She was full of suspicions, and the bruise on the Westerner's cheek did not tend to allay them. They were still unsatisfied when the porter took her to the end of the car to brush her clothes.

The discretion of that young man had its limits. While he brushed the girl he told her rapidly what he had seen in the vestibule.

"Was he hurt?" she asked breathlessly.

"No'm. I looked out and seen him standing beside the track jes' a cussin' a blue streak. He's a sho' 'nough bad actor, that Jerry Durand."

Kitty marched straight to her section. The eyes of the girl flashed anger.

"Please leave my seat, sir," she told Clay.

The Arizonan rose at once. He knew that she knew. "I was intendin' to help you off with yore grips," he said.

She flamed into passionate resentment of his interference. "I'll attend to them. I can look out for myself, sir."

With that she turned her back on him.

CHAPTER III.

THE BIG TOWN.

WHEN Clay stepped from the express into the Pennsylvania Station he wondered for a moment if there was a circus or a frontier day show in town. The shouts of the porters, the rush of men and women toward the gates, the whirl and eddy of a vast life all about him, took him back to the few hours he had spent in Chicago.

As he emerged at the Thirty-Fourth Street entrance, New York burst upon him with what seemed almost a threat. He could hear the roar of it like a river rushing down a cañon. Clay had faced a cattle stampede. He had ridden out a blizzard hunched up with the drifting herd. He had lived rough all his young and joyous life. But for a moment he felt a chill drench at his heart that was almost dread. He did not know a soul in this vast populace. He was alone among seven or eight million crazy human beings.

He had checked his suit-case to be free to look about. He had no destination and was in no hurry. All the day was before him, all of many days. He drifted down the street and across to Sixth Avenue. He clung to the safety of one of the Elevated posts as the traffic surged past. The clang of surface cars and the throb of motors filled the air constantly. He wondered at the daring of a pink-cheeked slip of a girl driving an automobile with sure touch through all this tangle of traffic. While he waited to plunge across the street there came a roar overhead that reminded him again of a wall of water he had once heard tearing down a cañon in his home land.

Instinctively one arm clutched at the post. A monster went flying through the air with a horrible, grinding menace. It

was only the Elevated on its way up-town. Clay looked around in whimsical admiration of the hurrying people about him. None of them seemed aware either of the noise or the crush of vehicles. They went on their preoccupied way swiftly and surely.

"I never did see such a town, and me just hittin' the fringes of it yet," Clay moaned aloud in comic despair, unaware that even New York has no noisier street than Sixth Avenue.

Chance swept him up Sixth to Herald Square. He was caught in the river of humanity that races up Broadway. His high-heeled boots clicked on the pavement of one of the world's great thoroughfares as far as Forty-Second Street. Under the shadow of a high building he stopped to look about him. Motor-cars, street-cars, and trucks rolled past in endless confusion. Every instant the panorama shifted, yet it was always the same. He wondered where all this rush of people was going. What crazy impulses sent them surging to and fro? And the girls—Clay surrendered to them at discretion. He had not supposed there were so many pretty, well-dressed girls in the world.

"I reckon money grows on trees in New York," he told himself aloud with a grin.

Broadway fascinated him. He followed it up-town toward Longacre Circle. The street was as usual in a state of chronic excavation. His foot slipped and he fell into a trench while trying to cross. When he emerged it was with a pound or two of Manhattan mud on his corduroy suit. He looked at himself again with a sense that his garb did not quite measure up to New York standards.

"First off I'm going to get me a real city suit of clothes," he promised himself. "This here wrinkled outfit is some too woolly for the big town. It's a good suit yet—'most as good as when I bought it at the Boston Store in Tucson three years ago. But I reckon I'll save it to go home in."

To a policeman directing traffic at a crossing he applied for information.

"Can you tell me where there's a dry-goods store in this man's town?" he asked. "I fell into this here Broadway and got kinda messed up."

"Watcha want?"

"Suit o' clothes."

The traffic cop sized him up in one swift glance. "Siventh Avenue," he said, and pointed in that direction.

Clay took his advice. He stopped in front of a store above which was the legend I. Bernstein, Men's Garments. A small man with sharp little eyes and well-defined nose was standing in the doorway.

"Might you would want a good suit of qvality clothes, my friendt?" he suggested.

"You've pegged me right," agreed the Westerner with his ready smile. "Lead me to it."

Mr. Bernstein personally conducted his customer to the suit department. "I wait on you myself on account you was a stranger to the city," he explained.

The little man took a suit from a rack and held it at arm's length to admire it. His fingers caressed the woof of it lovingly. He evidently could bring himself to part with it only after a struggle.

"Worsted. Fine goods." He leaned toward the range rider and whispered a secret. "Imported."

Clay shook his head. "Not what I want." His eyes ranged the racks. "This is more my notion of the sort of thing I like." He pointed to a blue serge with a little stripe in the pattern.

The eyes of Mr. Bernstein marveled at the discrimination of his customer. "If you had taken an advice from me it would have been to buy that suit. A man gets a chance at a superior garment like that, understan' me, only once in a while occasionally."

"How much?" asked Lindsay.

The dealer was too busy to hear this cross-question. That suit, Clay gathered, had been the pride of his heart ever since he had seen it first. He detached the coat lovingly from the hanger and helped his customer into it. Then he fell back, eyes lit with enthusiastic amazement. Only fate could have brought together this man and this suit, so manifestly destined for each other since the hour when Eve began to patch up fig leaves for Adam.

"Like a coat of paint," he murmured aloud.

The cow-puncher grinned. He understood the business that went with selling a suit in some stores. But it happened that he liked this suit himself. "How much?" he repeated.

The owner of the store dwelt on the merits of the suit, its style, its durability, the perfect fit. He covered his subject with artistic thoroughness. Then, reluctantly, he confided in a whisper the price at which he was going to sacrifice this suit among suits.

"To you, my friendt, I make this garment for only fifty-five dollars." He added another secret detail. "Below wholesale cost."

A little devil of mirth lit in Lindsay's eye. "I'd hate to have you rob yoreself like that. And me a perfect stranger to you, too."

"Qvality, y' understan' me. Which a man must got to sell garments like I done to appreciate such a suit. All wool. Every thread of it. Unshrinkable. This is a qvality town. If you want the best it costs a little more, but you got anyhow a suit which a man might be married in without shame, understan' me."

"All wool, you say?" asked Clay, feeling the texture. He had made up his mind to buy it, though he thought the price a bit stiff.

Mr. Bernstein protested on his honor that there was not a thread of cotton in it. "Which you could take it from me that when I sell a suit of clothes it is like I am dealing with my own brother," he added. "Every garment out of this store takes my personal guarantee."

Clay tried on the trousers and looked at himself in the glass. So far as he could tell he looked just like any other New Yorker.

"I'll take it," he said.

The clothier called his tailor from the rear of the store to make an adjustment in the trousers. Meanwhile he deftly removed the tags which told him in cipher that the suit had cost him just eleven dollars and seventy-five cents.

Half an hour later Clay sat on top of a Fifth Avenue bus which was jerking its way up-town. His shoes were shined to mirror brightness. He was garbed in a blue serge suit with a little stripe running through the pattern. That suit just now was the apple of his eye. It proved him a New Yorker and not a wild man from the Arizona desert.

CHAPTER IV.

A NEW USE FOR A WATER HOSE.

THE motor-bus ran up Fifth Avenue, cut across to Broadway, passed Columbus Circle, and swept into the Drive. It was a day divinely young and fair. The fragrance of a lingering spring was wafted to the nostrils. Only the evening before the trees had been given a bath of rain, and the refreshment of it showed in every quivering leaf. From its little waves the Hudson reflected a million sparkles of light. Glimpses of the park tempted Clay. Its winding paths! The children playing on the grass while their maids, in neat caps and aprons, gossiped together on the benches near! This was the most human spot the man from Arizona had seen in the metropolis.

Somewhere in the early three-figure streets he descended from the top of the bus and let his footsteps follow his inclinations into the park. A little shaver in a sailor suit ran across the path and fell sprawling at the feet of Clay. He picked him up and began to comfort the howling four-year-old.

"That sure was a right hard fall, sonny, but you're not going to make any fuss about it. You're daddy's little man, and—"

A sharp, high voice cut into his consolation.

"Cedric, come here!"

The little boy went, bawling lustily to win sympathy. The nursemaid shook him impatiently. "How many times have I told you to look where you're going? Serves you just right. Now be still."

There was a deep instinct in Clay to stand by those in trouble when they were weak. A child or a woman in distress always had a claim on him.

"I reckon the li'l fellow was in a hurry, miss," he said, smiling. "I 'most always was at his age. But he ain't hurt much."

The maid looked Clay up and down scornfully before she turned her back on him and began to talk with another nurse.

Beneath the tan of the range rider's cheeks the color flamed. This young woman had mistaken the friendliness of the West for the impudence of a street masher. The impulse of snobbery had expressed itself in her action.

The cow-puncher followed a path that took him back to the street. He grinned, but there was no smile in his heart. He was wounded, and he wanted to get away from the scene of his humiliation. What were the folks like in this part of the country that you couldn't speak to them without getting insulted?

He struck across the Drive into a side street. An apartment house occupied the corner, but from the other side a row of handsome private dwellings faced him.

The janitor of the apartment house was watering the parking beyond the sidewalk. The edge of the stream from the nozzle of the hose sprayed the path in front of Clay. He hesitated for a moment to give the man time to turn aside the hose.

But the janitor on this particular morning had been fed up with trouble. One of the tenants had complained of him to the agent of the place. Another had moved away without tipping him for an hour's help in packing he had given her. He was sulkily of the opinion that the whole world was in a conspiracy to annoy him. Just now the approaching rube typified the world.

A little flirt of the hose deluged Clay's newly shined boots and the lower six inches of his trousers.

"Look out what you're doing," protested the man from Arizona.

"I tank you better look where you're going," retorted the one from Sweden. He was a heavy-set, muscular man, with a sullen, obstinate face.

"My shoes and trousers are sopping wet."

"Yust yu bate it oop street. I ant look for no trouble with no rubes."

"I believe you did it on purpose."

"Tank so? Val, yust one teng I lak to tell yu. I got no time for damn fule talk."

The Westerner started on his way. There was no use having a row with a sulky janitor.

But the Swede misunderstood his purpose. At Clay's first step forward, he jerked round the nozzle and let the range rider have it with full force.

Clay was swept back to the wall by the heavy pressure of water that played over him. The stream moved swiftly up and down him from head to foot till it had drenched every inch of the perfect fifty-five-dollar suit. He drowned fathoms deep in a water-spout. He was swept over Niagara Falls. He came to life again to find himself the choking center of a world flood. He sputtered furiously while his arms flailed like windmills to keep back the river of water that engulfed him.

The thought that brought him back to action was one that had to do with the blue serge. The best fifty-five-dollar suit in New York was ruined in this submarine disaster.

He gave a strangled whoop and charged straight at the man behind the hose. The two clinched. While they struggled, the writhing hose slapped back and forth between them like an agitated snake. Clay had one advantage. He was wet through anyhow. It did not matter how much of the deluge struck him. The janitor fought to keep dry and he had not a chance on earth to succeed.

For one hundred and seventy-five pounds of Arizona bone and muscle, toughened by years of hard work in sun and wind, had clamped itself upon him. The nozzle twisted toward the janitor. He ducked, went down, and was instantly submerged. When he tried to rise, the stream beat him back. He struggled half way up, slipped, got again to his feet, and came down sitting with a hard bump when his legs skated from under him.

A smothered "Vat t' 'ell!" rose out of the waters. It was both a yelp of rage and a wail of puzzled chagrin. The janitor could not understand what was happening

to him. He did not know that he was being treated to a new form of the water cure.

Before his dull brain had functioned to action an iron grip had him by the back of the neck. He was jerked to his feet and propelled forward to the curb. Every inch of the way the heavy stream from the nozzle broke on his face and neck. It paralyzed his resistance, jarred him so that he could not gather himself to fight. He was still sputtering "By damn!" when Clay bumped him up against a hitching-post, garroted him, and swung the hose around the post in such a way as to encircle the feet of the man.

The cowpuncher drew the hose tight, slipped the nozzle through the iron ring, and caught the flapping arms of the man to his body. With the deft skill of a trained roper, Clay swung the rubber pipe round the body of the man again and again, drawing it close to the post and knotting it securely behind. The Swede struggled, but his furious rage availed him nothing. He was in the hands of the champion roper of Graham County, a man who had hogtied a wild hill-steer in thirty-three seconds by the watch.

It took longer than this to rope up the husky janitor with a squirming hose, but when Clay stepped back to inspect his job, he knew he was looking at one that had been done thoroughly.

"I keel you, by damn, ef you don't turn me loose," roared the big man in a rage.

The range rider grinned gaily at him. He was having the time of his young life. He did not even regret his fifty-five-dollar suit. Already he could see that Arizona had nothing on New York when it came to getting action for your money.

"Life's just loaded to the hocks with disappointment, Olie," he explained, and his voice was full of genial sympathy. "I'll bet a dollar Mex you'd sure like to beat me on the haid with a two by four. But I don't reckon you'll ever get that fond wish gratified. We're not liable to meet up with each other again pronto. You see, I'm on my travels. I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on the way."

He waved a hand jauntily and turned to go. But he changed his mind. His eye had fallen on a young woman standing at a French window of the opposite house. She was beckoning to him imperiously.

The young woman disappeared as he crossed the street, but in a few moments the door opened and she stood there waiting for him. Clay stared. He had never seen a girl dressed like this before. She was in riding boots, breeches, and coat. She looked at him just as steadily, her eyes dilating.

"Wyoming?" she asked at last in a low voice.

"Arizona," he answered.

"It's all the same. I knew it the moment I saw you tie him. Come in." She stood a little to one side to let him pass.

He hesitated. One glance had told him that it was the home of wealthy people. His instinct for values made it clear that the painting at the other end of the hall had cost a small fortune. The woodwork, the polished floors, the Oriental rugs, all spoke of ample means.

"Come in," she ordered again a little sharply.

He came in and she closed the door.

"I'm sopping wet. I'll drip all over the floor."

"What was it all about?" she asked.

He told her. A fugitive dimple flashed into her cheek. She bit her lip to keep back a smile.

"What are you going to do? I suppose you know you'll be arrested."

"Thought I'd give myself to the marshal."

She laughed outright at that. "Not in this town. A stranger like you would have no chance. Listen." There came to them the sound of a *rat-tat-tat-tat* outside. "It's the policeman rattling his night-stick on the curbstone. He's calling help."

"I could explain to him how it happened."

"He won't understand. You're just the kind of a man they like to run in and send up. You would surely be found guilty."

He moved from the rug where he was standing to let the water drip on the hardwood floor.

"Sho! Folks are mostly reasonable. I'd tell the judge how it happened. Anyhow, I can't stay here."

"Why not?" The dark-lashed violet-blue eyes faced his as frankly as those of a boy. "Why can't you stay here till they've gone?"

Her invitation warmed his heart, but he tried to explain gently why he could not. "This is my rookus, miss. I cayn't drag you into it. Like as not the Swede saw me come in here."

"No, he didn't. You tied him with his back to us."

"I ain't dressed up for calling. He sure ruined my clothes a heap." He looked down at himself with a chuckle of mirth. The suit he had been so proud of was shrinking so that his arms and legs stuck out like sign posts. He observed too that the color had run and left the goods a peculiar bilious-looking overall blue.

"Come with me."

To a servant who had come forward the young woman spoke. "Jenkins, have Nora clean up the floor and the steps outside. I don't want the police to know that anybody has come into the house."

"Yes, miss."

"Refer the officers to me if they should insist on coming in."

"I'll look to it, miss."

She led Clay up the massive stairway to a little library den on the second floor. Here she lit the gas log.

"Wait just a minute, please."

The girl stepped briskly from the room. There was a crisp decision in her manner, a trim gallantry in her poise that won him instantly.

"I'll bet she'd do to ride with," he told himself.

When she came back it was to take him to a dressing-room on the second floor. A complete change of clothing was laid out for him on a couch. A man whom Clay recognized as a valet—he had seen duplicates of him in the moving pictures at Tucson—was there to supply his needs and attend to the temperature of his bath.

"Stevens will look after you," she said, "when you are ready come back to dad's den."

His eyes followed to the door her resilient step. Once, when he was a boy, he had seen Ada Rehan play in "As You Like It." Her acting had entranced him. This girl carried him back to that hour. She was boyish as *Rosalind,* woman in every motion of her slim and lissom body.

At the head of the stairway she paused. Jenkins was moving hurriedly up to meet her.

"It's a policeman, miss. 'E's come about the—the person that came in, and 'e's talkin' to Nora on the steps. She's a jollyin' 'im, as you might say, miss."

His mistress nodded. She swept the hall with the eye of a general. Swiftly she changed the position of a Turkish rug so as to hide a spot on the polished floor that had been recently scrubbed and was still moist. It seemed best to discover Nora's plan of campaign before taking over the charge of affairs.

"Many's the time I've met yuh going down the avenoo with your heels clicking an' your head high," came the rich brogue of Miss O'Flannigan. "An' I've said to myself, sez I, who's the handsome officer that sets off his uniform so gr-rand?"

The girl leaned on her mop and gave the policeman a slant glance out of eyes of Irish brown. It was not Nora's fault that she was as pretty a colleen as ever came out of Limerick, but there was no law that made her send such a roguish, come-hither look at the man in blue.

He beamed. He was as pleased as a cat that has been stroked and fed cream.

"Well, an' yuh're not the only wan that notices, Miss Nora. An' it's the truth that I'd be glad enough to meet yuh some fine evening when I'm off duty. But about this strong-arm guy that tied up the janitor. The Swede says he went into wan av these houses. Now here's the wet color from his suit that ran over the steps. He musta come up here."

"Before he ran down the street. Sure, an' that's just what he done. Yuh're a janious, officer."

"Maybe he got into the house somehow."

"Now how could he do that? With all av us up-stairs and down."

"I don't say he did. But if I was to just take a look inside so as to report that I'd searched—"

"Och! Yuh'd be wastin' your time, officer."

"Sure, I know that. But for the report—"

The young woman in the riding costume chose this moment to open the door and saunter out.

"Does the officer want something, Nora?" she asked innocently, switching the end of a crop against her riding boots.

"Yes, miss. There's been a ruffian batting up Swedes an' tying them to posts. This officer thinks he came here," explained Nora.

"Does he want to look in the house?"

"Yes, miss."

"Then let him come in." The young mistress took the responsibility on her own shoulders. She led the policeman into the hall. "I don't really see how he could have got in here without some of us seeing him, officer."

"No, ma'am. I don't see how he could." The patrolman scratched his red head. "The janitor's a Swede, anyhow. He jist guessed it. I came to make sure av it. I'll be sorry for troubling yuh, miss."

The smile she gave him was warm and friendly. "Oh, that's all right. If you'd care to look around—but there really is no use."

"No." The forehead under the red thatch wrinkled in thought. "He *said* he seen him come in here or next door, an' he came up the steps. But nobody could have got in without some of youse seeing him. That's a lead pipe." The officer pushed any doubt that remained from his mind. "Only a muddle-headed Swede."

"It was good of you to come. It makes us feel safer to have officers like you. If you'll give me your name I'll call up the precinct captain and tell him so."

The man in uniform turned beet red. "McGuffey, miss, and it's a pleasure to serve the likes of yuh," he said, pleased and embarrassed.

He bowed himself out backward, skidded on the polished floor, and saved himself from going down by a frantic fling of arms and some fancy skating. When he recovered, his foot caught in a rug and wadded it to a knot.

Nora giggled behind her fingers, but her mistress did not even smile at the awkwardness of Patrolman McGuffey.

"Thank you *so* much," she said sweetly.

CHAPTER V.

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE SALVATION ARMY.

WHILE Beatrice Whitford waited in the little library for the Arizonan to join her, she sat in a deep chair, chin in hand, eyes fixed on the jetting flames of the gas log. A little flush had crept into the oval face. In her blood there tingled the stimulus of excitement. For into her life an adventure had come from far-away cattleland.

A crisp, strong footstep sounded in the hall. Her fingers flew to pat into place the soft golden hair coiled low at the nape of the neck. At times she had a boylike unconcern of sex; again, a spirit wholly feminine.

The clothes of her father fitted Lindsay loosely, for Colin Whitford had begun to take on the flesh of middle age and Clay was lean and clean of build as an elk. But the Westerner was one of those to whom clothes are unimportant. The splendid youth of him would have shone through the rags of a beggar.

"My name is Clay Lindsay," he told her by way of introduction.

"Mine is Beatrice Whitford," she answered.

They shook hands.

"I'm to wait here till my clothes dry, yore man says."

"Then you'd better sit down," she suggested.

Within five minutes she knew that he had been in New York less than three hours. His impressions of the city amused and entertained her. He was quite simple. She could look into his mind as though it were a deep, clear well. There was something inextinguishably boyish and buoyant about him. But in his bronzed face and steady humorous eyes were strength and

shrewdness. He was the last man in the world a bunco steerer could play for a sucker. She felt that. Yet he made no pretenses of a worldly wisdom he did not have.

A voice reached them from the top of the stairs.

"Do you know where Miss Whitford is, Jenkins?"

"Hin the red room, sir." The answer was in the even colorless voice of a servant.

The girl rose at once. "If you'll excuse me," she said, and stepped out of the room.

"Hello, Bee. What do you think? I never saw such idiots as the police of this town are. They're watching this house for a desperado who assaulted some one outside. I met a sergeant on our steps. Says he doesn't think the man's here, but there's just a chance he slipped into the basement. It's absurd."

"Of course it is." There was a ripple of mirth in the girl's voice. "He didn't come in by the basement at all, but walked in at the front door."

"Whom are you talking about?"

"The desperado, dad."

"The front door!" exploded her father. "What do you mean? Who let him in?"

"I did. He came as my guest, at my invitation."

"What?"

"Don't shout, dad," she advised. "I thought I had brought you up better."

"But—but—but—what do you mean?" he sputtered. "Is this ruffian in the house now?"

"Oh, yes. He's in the red room here—and unless he's very deaf he hears everything we are saying," the girl answered calmly, much amused at the amazement of her father. "Won't you come in and see him? He doesn't seem very desperate."

Clay rose, pin-points of laughter dancing in his eyes. He liked the gay audacity of this young woman, just as he liked the unconventional pluck with which she had intruded herself into his affairs as a rescuer and the businesslike efficiency that had got him out of his wet rags into comfortable clothes.

A moment later he was offering a brown hand to Colin Whitford, who took it reluctantly, with the same wariness a boxer does that of his opponent in the ring. His eyes said plainly, "What the deuce are you doing here, sitting in my favorite chair, smoking one of my imported cigars, wearing my clothes, and talking to my daughter?"

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Whitford. Yore daughter has just saved my life from the police," the Westerner said, and his friendly smile was very much in evidence.

"You make yourself at home, young man," answered the owner of a large per cent of the stock of the famous Bird Cage mine.

"My guests do, dad. It's the proof that I'm a perfect hostess," retorted Beatrice, her dainty provocative face flashing to mirth.

"H-m!" grunted her father dryly. "I'd like to know, young man, why the police are shadowing this house?"

"I expect they're looking for me."

"I expect they are, and I'm not sure I won't help them find you. You'll have to show cause if I don't."

"His bark is much worse than his bite," the girl explained to Clay, just as though her father were not present.

"H-m!" exploded the mining magnate a second time. "Get busy, young fellow."

Clay told the story of the fifty-five-dollar suit that I. Bernstein had wished on him with near tears of regret at parting from it. The cowpuncher dramatized the situation with some native talent for mimicry. His arms gestured like the lifted wings of a startled cockerel. "A man gets a chance at a garment like that only once in a while, occasionally. Which you can take it from me that when I. Bernstein sells a suit of clothes it is shust like he is dealing with his own brother. Qvality, my friendts, qvality!"

Colin Whitford was of the West himself. He had lived its rough-and-tumble life for years before he made his lucky strike in the Bird Cage. He had moved from Colorado to New York only ten years before. The sound of Clay's drawling voice was like a message from home. He began to grin in spite of himself. This man was

too good to be true. It wasn't possible that anybody could come to the big town and import into it so naively such a genuine touch of the outdoor West. It was not possible, but it had happened just the same. Of course Manhattan would soon take the color out of him. It always did out of everybody. The city was so big, so overpowering, so individual itself, that it tolerated no individuality in its citizens. Whitford had long since become a conformist. He was willing to bet a hat that this big brown Arizonan would eat out of the city's hand within a week. In the meantime he wanted to be among those present while the process of taming the wild man took place. Long before the cow-puncher had finished his story of hog-tying the Swede to a hitching-post with his own hose the mining man was sealed of the large tribe of Clay Lindsay's admirers. He was ready to hide him from all the police in New York.

Whitford told Stevens to bring in the fifty-five-dollar suit so that he could gloat over it. He let out a whoop of delight at sight of its still sodden appearance. He examined its sickly hue with chuckles of mirth.

"Guaranteed not to fade or shrink," murmured Clay sadly.

He managed to get the coat on with difficulty. The sleeves reached just below his elbows.

"You look like a lifer from Sing Sing," pronounced Whitford joyously. "Get a haircut, and you won't have a chance on earth to fool the police."

"The color did run and fade some," admitted Clay.

"Worth every cent of nine ninety-eight at a bargain sale before the Swede got busy with it—and he let you have it at a sacrifice for fifty-five dollars." The millionaire wept happy tears as a climax of his rapture. He swallowed his cigar smoke and had to be pounded on the back by his daughter.

"Would you mind getting yore man to wrop it up for me? I'm going to have a few pleasant words with I. Bernstein," said Clay with mock mournfulness.

"When?" asked Whitford promptly.

"Never you mind when, sah. I'm not issuing any tickets of admission. It's going to be a strictly private entertainment."

"Are you going to take a water hose along?"

"That's right," reproached Clay. "Make fun of me because I'm a stranger and come right from the alfalfa country." He turned to Beatrice cheerfully. "O' course he bit me good and proper. I'm green. But I'll bet he loses that smile awful quick when he sees me again."

"You're not going to—"

"Me, I'm the gentlest citizen in Arizona. Never in trouble. Always peaceable and quiet. Don't you get to thinkin' me a bad man, for I ain't."

Jenkins came to the door and announced "Mr. Bromfield."

Almost on his heels a young man in immaculate riding clothes sauntered into the room. He had the assured ease of one who has the run of the house. Miss Whitford introduced the two young men and Bromfield looked the Westerner over with a suave insolence in his dark, handsome eyes.

Clay recognized him immediately. He had shaken hands once before with this well-satisfied young man, and on that occasion a fifty-dollar bill had passed from one to the other. The New Yorker evidently did not know him.

It became apparent at once that Bromfield had called to go riding in the park with Miss Whitford. That young woman came up to say good-by to her new acquaintance.

"Will you be here when I get back?"

"Not if our friends outside give me a chance for a getaway," he told her.

Her bright unflinching eyes looked into his. "You'll come again and let us know how you escaped," she invited.

"I'll ce'tainly do that, Miss Whitford."

"Then we'll look for you Thursday afternoon, say."

"I'll be here."

"If the police don't get you."

"They won't," he promised serenely.

"When you're quite ready, Bee," suggested Bromfield in a bored voice.

She nodded casually and walked out of

the room like a young Diana, straight as a dart in her trim slenderness.

Clay slipped out of the house by the back way, cut across to the subway, and took a down-town train. He got out at Forty-Second Street and made his way to the clothing establishment of I. Bernstein.

That gentlemen was in his office in the rear of the store. Lindsay walked back to it, opened and closed the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

The owner of the place rose in alarm from the stool where he was sitting. "What right do you got to lock that door?" he demanded.

"I don't want to be interrupted while I'm selling you this suit, Mr. Bernstein," the cowpuncher told him easily, and he proceeded to unwrap the damp package under his arm. "It's a pippin of a suit. The color won't run or fade, and it's absolutely unshrinkable. You won't often get a chance at a suit like this. Notice the style, the cut, the quality of the goods. And it's only going to cost you fifty-five dollars."

The clothing man looked at the misshapen thing with eyes that bulged. "Where is it you been with this suit—in the East River, my friendt?" he wanted to know.

"I took a walk along Riverside Drive. That's all. I got a strong guarantee with this suit when I bought it. I'm going to give you the same one I got. It won't shrink or fade and it will wear to beat a 'Pache pup. Oh, you won't make any mistake buying this suit."

"You take from me an advice. Unlock that door and get out."

"I can give you better advice than that. Buy this suit right away. You'll find it's a bargain."

The steady eyes of the Westerner daunted the merchant, but he did not intend to give up fifty-five dollars without a murmur.

"If you don't right away soon open that door I call the police. Then you go to jail, ain't it?"

"How's yore heart, Mr. Bernstein?" asked Clay tenderly.

"What?"

"I'm askin' about yore heart. I don't know as you're hardly strong enough to stand what I'll do to you if you let a single yelp out of you. I kinda hate to hurry yore funeral," he added regretfully, still in his accustomed soft drawl.

The man beside the stool attempted one shout. Instantly Clay filled his mouth with a bunch of suit samples that had been lying on the desk. With one arm he held the struggling little man close to his body. With his foot and the other hand he broke in two a yardstick and fitted the two parts together.

"Here's the program," he said by way of explanation. "I'm going to put you over my knee and paddle you real thorough. When you make up yore mind that you want to buy that suit for fifty-five dollars it will be up to you to let me know. Take yore own time about it. Don't let me hurry you."

Before the program had more than well started the victim of it signified his willingness to treat with the foe. To part with fifty-five dollars was a painful business, but not to part with it was going to hurt a good deal more. He chose the lesser of two evils.

While he was counting out the bills, Clay bragged up the suit. He praised its merits fluently and cheerfully. When he left he locked the door of the office behind him and handed over the key to one of the clerks.

"I've got a kinda notion Mr. Bernstein wants to get out of his office. He's actin' sort o' restless, seems like."

Restless was hardly the word. He was banging on the door like a wild man. "Police! Murder! Help!" he shouted in a high falsetto.

Clay wasted no time. He and the fifty-five dollars vanished into the street. In his haste he bumped into a Salvation Army lassie with a tambourine.

She held it out to him for a donation, and was given the shock of her life. For into that tambourine the big brown man crammed a fistful of bills. He waited for no thanks, but cut round the corner toward Broadway in a hurry.

When the girl reached headquarters and

counted the contributions she found it amounted to just fifty-five dollars.

CHAPTER VI.

CLAY TAKES A TRANSFER.

FROM the top of a bus, Clay Lindsay looked down a cañon which angled across the great city like a river of light.

He had come from one land of gorges to another. In the walls of this one, thousands and tens of thousands of cliff-dwellers hid themselves during the day like animals of some queer breed and poured out into the cañon at sunset.

Now the river in its bed was alive with a throbbing tide. Cross currents of humanity flowed into it from side streets and ebbed out of it into others. Streams of people were swept down, caught here and there in swirling eddies. Taxies, private motors, and trolley cars struggled in the raceway.

Electric sky-signs flashed and changed. From the foyer of theaters and moving picture palaces, thousands of bulbs flung their glow to the gorge. A mist of light hung like an atmosphere above the Great White Way.

All this Clay saw in a flash while his bus crossed Broadway on its way to the avenue. His eyes had become accustomed to this brilliance in the weeks that had passed since his descent upon New York, but familiarity had not yet dulled the wonder of it.

The avenue offered a more subdued picture. This facet showed a glimpse of the city lovelier and more leisurely, though not one so feverishly gay. It carried his mind to Beatrice Whitford. Some touch of the quality of Fifth Avenue was in her soul. It expressed itself in the simple elegance of her dress and in the fineness of the graceful vital body. Her gaiety was not at all the high spirits of Broadway, but there were times when her kinship to Fifth Avenue smothered the foolish hopes in his heart.

He had become a fast friend of Miss Whitford. Together they had tramped through Central Park and motored up the Hudson in one of her father's cars. They had explored each other's minds along with the country and each had known the surprise and delight of discoveries, of finding in the other a quality of freshness and candor.

Clay sensed in this young woman a spirit that had a way of sweeping up on gay young wings to sudden joys stirred by the simplest causes. Her outlook on life was as gallant as that of a fine-tempered schoolboy. A gallop in the park could whip the flag of happiness into her cheeks. A wild flower nestling in a bed of moss could bring the quick light to her eyes. Her responsiveness was a continual delight to him just as her culture was his despair. Of books, pictures, and music, she knew much more than he.

The bus jerked down Fifth Avenue like a boat in heavy seas, pausing here and there at the curb to take on a passenger. While it was getting under-way after one such stop another down-town bus rolled past.

Clay came to a sudden alert attention. His eyes focused on a girl sitting on a back seat. In the pretty, childish face he read a wistful helplessness, a pathetic hint of misery that called for sympathy.

Arizona takes short cuts to its ends. Clay rose instantly, put his foot on the railing, and leaped across to the top of the bus rolling parallel with the one he was on. In another second he had dropped into the seat beside the girl.

"Glad to meet you again, Miss Kitty," he said cheerfully. "How's the big town been using you?"

The girl looked at him with a little gasp of surprise. "Mr. Lindsay!" Sudden tears filmed her eyes. She forgot that she had left him with the promise never again to speak to him. She was in a far country, and he was a friend from home.

The conductor bustled down the aisle. "Say, where do you get this movie stuff? You can't jump from the top of one bus to another."

Clay smiled. "I can't, but I did."

"That ain't the system of transfers we use in this town. You might 'a' got killed."

"Oh, well, let's not worry about that now."

"I'd ought to have you pulled. Three years I've been on this run and—"

"Good run? Wages good?"

"Don't get gay, young fellow. I can tell you one thing. You've got to pay another fare."

Clay paid it.

The conductor retired to his post. He grinned in spite of his official dignity. There was something about this young fellow he liked. After he had been in New York a while he would be properly tamed.

"What about that movie job? Is it pannin' out pay gold?" Lindsay asked Kitty.

Bit by bit her story came out. It was a common enough one. She had been flimflammed out of her money by the alleged school of moving picture actors, and the sharpers had decamped with it.

As she looked at her recovered friend, Kitty gradually realized an outward transformation in his appearance. He was dressed quietly in clothes of perfect fit made for him by Colin Whitford's tailor. From shoes to hat he was a New Yorker got up regardless of expense. But the warm smile, the strong, tanned face, the grip of the big brown hand that buried her small one—all these were from her own West. She too had seen the nonchalance with which he had stepped from the rail of one moving bus to that of the other, just as though this were his usual method of transfer.

"I've got a job at last," she explained to him. "I could hardly find one. They say I'm not trained to do anything."

"What sort of a job have you?"

"I'm working down-town in Greenwich Village, selling cigarettes. I'm Carmen the Cigarette Girl. Leastways that's what they call me. I carry a tray of them, evenings into the cafés."

"Greenwich Village?" asked Clay.

Kitty was not able to explain that the village is a state of mind which is the habitat of long-haired men and short-haired women, the brains of whom functioned in a way totally alien to all her methods of thought. The meaning of Bohemianism was quite lost on her simple soul.

"They're just queer," she told him. "The women bob their hair and wear smocks and sandals. The men are long-haired softies. They all talk kind o' foolish." Kitty despaired of making the situation clear to him and resorted to the personal. "Can't you come down to-night to the Purple Cow or the Sea Siren and see for yourself?" she proposed, and gave him directions for finding the classic resorts.

"I reckon they must be medicine fakers," decided Clay. "I've met up with these long-haired guys before. Sure, I'll come."

"To-night?"

"You betcha, little pardner, I'll be there."

"I'm dressed silly—in bare feet and sandals and what they call a smock. You won't mind that, will you?"

"You'll look good to me, no matter what you wear, little Miss Colorado," he told her with his warm, big-brother smile.

"You're good," the girl said simply. "I knew that on the train even when I—when I was mean to you." There came into her voice a small tremor of apprehension. "I'm afraid of this town. It's so—so kind o' cruel. I've got no friends here."

He offered instant reassurance with a strong grip of his brown hand. "You've got one, little pardner. I'll promise that one big husky will be on the job when you need him. Don't you worry."

She gave him her shy eyes gratefully. There was a mist of tears in them.

"You're good," she said again naively.

CHAPTER VII.

ARIZONA FOLLOWS ITS LAWLESS IMPULSE.

WHEN Clay, two hours later, took the Sixth Avenue "L" for a plunge into Bohemianism, he knew no more about Greenwich Village than a six-month-old pup does about Vergil. But it was characteristic of him that on his way down-town he proceeded to find out from his chance seatmate something about this unknown terrane he was about to visit.

The man he sat beside was a patrolman off duty, and to this engaging Westerner

he was quite ready to impart any information he might have.

"Fakers," he pronounced promptly. "They're a bunch of long-haired nuts, most of 'em — queer guys who can't sell their junk and kid themselves into thinking they're artists and writers. They pull a lot of stuff about socialism and anarchy and high art."

"Just harmless cranks—gone loco mebbe?"

"Some of 'em. Others are there for the mazuma. Up-town, the Village is supposed to be one hell of a place. The people who own the dumps down there have worked up that rep to draw the night trade. They make a living outa the wickedness of Greenwich. Nothin' to it—all fake stuff. They advertise September Morn balls with posters something fierce, and when you go they are just like any other dances. Bum drawings of naked women on the walls done by artist yaps, decorations of purple cows, pirates' dens—that's the kind of dope they have."

The Sea Siren was already beginning to fill up when Clay descended three steps to a cellar and was warily admitted. A near Hawaiian orchestra was strumming out a dance tune, and a few couples were on the floor. Waitresses, got up as "Loreleis," were moving about among the guests delivering orders for refreshments.

The Westerner sat down in a corner and looked about him. The walls were decorated with crude purple crayons of underfed sirens. A statue of a nude woman distressed Clay. He did not mind the missing clothes, but she was so dreadfully emaciated that he thought it wise for her to cling to the yellow and red draped barber pole that rose from the pedestal. On the base was the legend, "The Weeping Lady." After he had tasted the Sea Siren fare the man from Arizona suspected that both her grief and her anemia arose from the fact that she had been fed on it.

A man in artist's velveteens, minus a hair-cut, with a large, fat, pasty face, sat at an adjoining table and discoursed to his friends. Presently, during an intermission of the music, he rose and took the rest of those present into his confidence. With rapt eyes on the far-away space of distant planets, he chanted his apologia.

"I believe in the cosmic urge, in the sublimity of my ego. I follow my lawless impulse where the gods of desire shall drive. I am what I am, son of the stars, lord of my life. With unleashed love I answer the psychic beat of pulse to pulse. Laughter, tears, and wo, the keen edge of passion, the languor of satiety—all these are life. Open-armed, I embrace them. I drink and assuage my thirst. For youth is here to-day. To-morrow, alas, it has gone. Now I am. In the then I shall not be. Kismet!"

The poet's fine frenzy faded. He sank back into his chair, apparently worn out by his vast mental effort.

Clay gave a deep chuckle of delight. This was good.

"Heap much oration," he murmured. "Go to it, old-timer. Steam off again. Git down in yore collar to it."

To miss none of the fun, he hitched a little closer on the bench. But the man without the hair-cut was through effervescing. He began to talk in a lower voice on world politics to admiring friends who were basking in his reflected glory.

"Bourgeois to the core," he announced with finality, speaking of the United States, in answer to a question. "What are the idols we worship? Law, the chain which binds an enslaved people; thrift, born of childish fear; love of country, which is another name for crass provincialism. I—I am a cosmopolite, not an American. Bohemia is my land, and all free souls are my brothers. Why should I agonize because Germany sank some American ships?"

Clay leaned forward on a search for information. "Excuse me for buttin' in, and me a stranger. But isn't it yore business when she murders American women and children?"

The pasty-faced man looked at him with thinly disguised contempt. "You wouldn't understand if I explained."

"Maybe so I wouldn't, but you take a whirl at it, and I'll listen high, wide, and handsome."

The man in velveteen unexpectedly found himself doing as he was told. There

was a suggestion of compulsion about the gray-blue eyes fastened on his, something in the clamp of the strong jaw that brought him up for a moment against stark reality.

"The *intelligensia* of a country knows that there can be no freedom until there is no law. Every man's duty is to disregard duty. So, by faring far on the wings of desire, he helps break down the slavery that binds us. Obey the cosmic urge of your soul regardless of where it leads you, young man."

It was unfortunate for the poet of Bohemia that at this precise moment Kitty Mason, dressed in sandals and a lilac-patterned smock, stood before him with a tray of cigarettes, asking for his trade. The naive appeal in her soft eyes had its weight with the poet. What is the use of living in Bohemia if one cannot be free to follow impulse? He slipped an arm about the girl and kissed the crimson lips upturned to him.

Kitty started back with a little cry.

The freedom taken by the near-poet was instantly avenged.

A cosmic urge beat in the veins of the savage from Arizona. He took the poet's advice and followed his lawless impulse where it led. Across the table a long arm reached. Sinewy fingers closed upon the flowing neckwear of the fat-faced orator and dragged him forward, leaving overturned glasses in the wake of his course.

The man in velveteens met the eyes of this energetic man-handler. This brown-faced barbarian looked very much like business.

"Don't you touch me! Don't you dare touch me!" the apostle of anarchy shrilled as the table crashed down. "I'll turn you over to the police."

Clay jerked him to his feet. Hard knuckles pressed cruelly into the soft throat of the villager. "Git down on yore ham bones and beg the lady's pardon, son of the stars, or I'll sure make you see a whole colony of yore ancestors. Tell her you're a yellow pup, but you don't reckon you'll ever pull a bone like that again. Speak right out in meeting pronto before you bump into the tears and wo you was makin' heap much oration about."

The proprietor of the café seized the cow-puncher by the arm hurriedly. "Here, stop that! You get out of the place. I'll not stand for any rough-house." And he murmured something about getting in bad with the police.

Clay tried to explain. "Me—I'm not rough-housing. I'm telling this here lord of life to apologize to the little lady, and let her know that he's sorry he was fresh. If he don't, I'll most ce'tainly muss up the sublimity of his ego."

The companions of the poet rushed forward to protest at the man-handling of their leader. Those in the rear jammed the front ones close to Clay and his captive. The cow-puncher gently but strongly pushed them back.

"Don't get on the prod," he advised in his genial drawl. "The poet, he's got an important engagement right now."

A kind of scuffle developed. The proprietor increased it by his hysterical efforts to prevent any trouble. Men joined themselves to the noisy group of which Clay was the smiling center. The excitement increased. Distant corners of the room became the refuge of the women. Some one struck at the cow-puncher over the heads of those about him. The mass of closely packed human beings showed a convulsive activity. It became suddenly the most popular indoor sport at the Sea Siren to slay this barbarian from the desert who had interfered with the amusements of Bohemia.

But Clay took a lot of slaying. In the rough-and-tumble life of the outdoor West, he had learned how to look out for his own hand. The copper hair of his strong, lean head rose above the tangle of the mêlée like the bromidic helmet of Navarre. A reckless light of mirth bubbled in his daredevil eyes. The very number of the opponents who interfered with each other trying to get at him was a guarantee of safety. The blows showered at him lacked steam, and were badly timed as to distance.

The pack rolled across the room, tipped over a table, and deluged an artist and his affinity with hot chocolate before they could escape from the avalanche. Chairs went over like ninepins. Stands collapsed.

Men grunted and shouted advice. Girls screamed. The Sea Siren was being wrecked by a cyclone from the bad lands.

Against the wall the struggling mob brought up with a crash. The velveteen poet caught at "The Weeping Lady" to save himself from going down. She descended from her pedestal into his arms and henceforth waltzed with him as a part of the subsequent proceedings.

The writhing mass carommed from the wall and revolved toward the musicians. A colored gentleman jumped up in alarm and brandished his instrument as a weapon.

"Keep away from this heah niggah," he warned, and simultaneously he aimed the drum of the mandolin at the red head which was the core of the tangle. His aim was deflected, and the wood crashed down upon the crown of the "The Weeping Lady." For the rest of the two-step it hung like a large ruff around his neck.

Arms thrashed wildly to and fro. The focal point of their destination was the figure at the center of the disturbance. Most of the blows found other marks. Four or five men could have demolished Clay. Fifteen or twenty found it a tough job, because they interfered with each other at every turn. They were packed too close for hard hitting. Clay was not fighting, but wrestling. He used his arms to push with rather than to strike blows that counted.

The Arizonan could not afterward remember at exactly what stage of the proceedings the face of Jerry Durand impinged itself on his consciousness. Once, when the swirl of the crowd flung him close to the door, he caught a glimpse of it, tight-lipped and wolf-eyed, turned to him with relentless malice. The gang leader was taking no part in the fight.

The crowd parted. Out of the pack a pair of strong arms and lean, broad shoulders plowed a way for a somewhat damaged face that still carried a debonair smile. With pantherish litheness the Arizonan ducked a swinging blow. The rippling muscles of the plunging shoulder tossed aside a little man in evening dress clawing at him. Yet a moment, and he was outside taking the three steps to the street.

Into his laboring lungs he drew deliciously the soft breath of the night. It cooled the fever of his hammered face, was like an icy bath to his hot body. A little dizzy from the blows that had been rained on him, he stood for a moment uncertain which way to go. From his throat there rippled a low peal of joyous mirth.

Then again he became aware of Durand. The man was not alone. He had with him a hulking ruffian whose heavy hunched shoulders told of strength. There was a hint of the gorilla in the way the long arms hung straight from the shoulders as he leaned forward. Both of the men were watching the cow-puncher as steadily as alley cats do a house finch.

"Hell's going to pop in about three seconds," announced Clay to himself.

Silently, without lifting their eyes from their victim for an instant, the two men moved apart to take him on both sides. He clung to the wall, forcing a frontal attack. The laughter had gone out of his eyes now. They had hardened to pin-points. This time it was no amateur horseplay. He was fighting for his life. No need to tell Clay Lindsay that the New York gangster meant to leave him as good as dead.

The men rushed him. He fought them back with clean, hard blows. Jerry bored in like a wild bull. Clay caught him off his balance, using a short arm jolt which had back of it all that twenty-three years of clean outdoors Arizona could give. The gangster hit the pavement hard.

He got up furious and charged again. The Arizonan, busy with the other man, tried to sidestep. An uppercut jarred him to the heel. In that instant of time before his knees began to sag beneath him, his brain flashed the news that Durand had struck him on the chin with brass knucks. He crumpled up and went down, still alive to what was going on, but unable to move in his own defense. Weakly he tried to protect his face and sides from the kicks of a heavy boot. Then he vanished into unconsciousness.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

The Sacking of El Dorado

by Max Brand

Author of "Who Am I?" "Fate's Honeymoon," "No Partners," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A CORNERED RAT.

THE heart of "Blinky" Meyers warmed. He had long played poker with more admiration than competition. The tales of his skill as a conjurer with cards had spread too far for his financial welfare.

It was known that he could "break" a new pack in the accustomed manner and "set it up" at the same time. It was further credited that he could "run up" a pack three times on his next deal. These feats were always sufficient to attract an admiring group around his table, but they discouraged opposition.

For six weeks now he had finished each night a paltry five or seven dollars to the good at Harris's. It was disheartening. He had even contemplated changing his hunting-ground. But familiarity drew him back to Harris's night after night.

It had once been the back room of a saloon and there was still a scattering of sawdust on the floor to grit comfortably under foot. It had been enlarged to take in several adjoining rooms, but it still carried the attraction of a place of mirth. And Blinky Myers loved mirth so that on night after night he was found under the dirty yellow flare of the gas-lights saying: "Holding two," "gimme two," and tapping his cigarettes softly on the table to shake out the dust before lighting.

But to-night his heart was warmed. For he had found a green pea, a sucker of the first water, an innocent with just enough knowledge of the ancient game to make him easy meat. It was a large-handed farmer from up-State who had come to New York to expand his already swollen bank-roll at the expense of the Manhattan gamblers.

Evidently he had found some success. Perhaps he had fallen in with more of the innocents on his first nights in the city. Certainly he had never encountered a card magician of the skill of Blinky.

Indeed he had a certain skill as Blinky discovered when he found a crimp in the pack on the stranger's first deal. The up-Stater could run up a pack once. He did it well. He knew the lay of the cards under his cut with a prophetic accuracy. So the heart of Blinky warmed.

The crowd which circled the table to watch the game was sympathetic. They were curious not as to the extent to which the up-Stater would fall, but as to how great his fall would be. And Blinky laid the tracks gradually and carefully before putting the skids under his opponent.

By the fourth hand he had marked every honor card in the pack by skilful little markings with his dexterous thumb-nails. They were faint incisions in the upper right-hand corner of each card and it would have troubled a man with a microscope to discover them. But Blinky could read them across the table without trouble. He need not have gone to the trouble of the marking, but he wished to make doubly sure of this fish before he landed him.

It was only after the stranger had won

four pots that Blinky began to use his real skill. He began by winning one and losing two, but each time his losses were several times smaller than his single winning. The pressure of the crisp roll of bills in his inside vest-pocket was infinitely assuring to him. He was playing carefully.

The crowd about the table was full of attention and admiration. They ventured careless remarks from time to time, full of significance to the initiated. And every time they spoke Blinky turned his head toward the speaker, but he never moved his steady, pale eyes from his opponent, and his thin little smile never varied.

There was something singular in that gaze. It surely could not have been through that that he had won the title of Blinky, for his glance was always fixed and unwavering. It was not challenging. The faint apology of the smile robbed it of offense. One could search in many sections of the world before he would find another expression like Blinky's. But let him go into one of the saloons along the lower bend of the Bowery where the Elevated thunders around toward the City Hall, and he would find many a duplicate of it, men with the same apologetic steadiness of eyes, a humble searching of the gaze as if exploring the character of the men in the barrooms, and which one might be approached for a drink.

To those not familiar with this type the gaze might indeed have been found sinister, suggestive of infinite reserve and ominous self-possession. To the initiate it is the last sign of the Manhattan gutter rat.

But the game was progressing more rapidly now. The up-State man was beginning to sweat under his losses, but he was also beginning to remember his former successes. He sat now bunched forward in his chair with a nervous smile on his lips and in his face the hungry expectancy of the gambler who waits for his "luck to change." The cards were "running against him." He turned from time to time toward the spectators to call them to witness how much the cards were against him, and each time he was met with the noncommittal shrugging of shoulders from men who exchanged half smiles when his head was turned.

Finally he commenced to call for drinks, Scotch and seltzer. After each loss he called, and each time the whisky was a little taller in the glass, the seltzer a little shorter.

His mood changed as he drank. He was cursing now, and each time more loudly. Blinky Meyers watched and judged with infinite care.

To be sure there was a little flat automatic pressing comfortably under his armpit. He had flashed that gun many a time before, but he had never fired it. He knew his men and he knew well enough that this customer was not a man to be bluffed out. He could not be frightened away with a mere show of weapons. Therefore the one thing that remained in the mind of Blinky was to cut and run when things came to a show-down.

He had no doubt that he could make his getaway should the stranger become obstreperous. He knew the rooms like a book. There was the electric switch to the left entrance over there. He could make for that door, running low, and switch out the lights as he passed, then double-back across the room and make down the opposite stairs to the street. In the confusion of darkness there was not a chance in a million that he would be caught. The stranger would follow down the stairs toward which he had headed.

All this was merely in case the up-Stater pressed things to an extremity, and as the game progressed Blinky had less and less doubt that this would be the case. The stranger was beginning to accept his losses with a savage silence and he kept a sulky eye upon Blinky's motions as he dealt the cards. He had already discovered that Blinky was running up the pack. Beyond a doubt he had noticed the first crimp in the cards, but he never could suspect either the second or the third run-up, and consequently he repeatedly banged into the other crimps.

So he sat stirring now and then viciously and clearing his throat and rolling his eyes as if he were rehearsing his outburst.

It never came. There was an unexpected interruption which surprised them all in the shape of a number of soft footsteps on the stairs, a sudden opening of a door, and the call of: "Don't move, any of you."

The place was pinched.

And for a second no one moved. All eyes turned toward the doors, which were blocked with plain-clothes men. All doors save one, and Blinky was the only one to notice this. Unquestionably if he had not previously figured on a quick getaway, he would never have had the courage to make the move. But the pressure of the roll of bills over his heart urged on his courage. And, furthermore, there was the weight of the gun under his arm-pit. It occurred to him now that if he were caught with that gun it would go hard with him. And there were several little affairs in his past which would hardly bear the investigating light the police were almost certain to turn on his life.

There was a shout of warning from one of the officers as he leaped from his seat, and, running low, made toward the door. He saw the detectives grouped there, braced to receive him. But they were not the object in Blinky's eyes. He swerved as he came to the door. His hand reached out and touched the switch. At once the place was dark and Blinky swerved again and made toward the door which he had seen unguarded.

The room was full of outcry and confusion. He stumbled across several prone figures on his way. Twice a pocket bull's-eye was flashed and these helped him toward his goal. In another moment he was through the door and running swiftly down the stairs.

He hardly noticed the shadow at the first landing until it resolved itself into the figure of a man and sprang on him suddenly.

And as the body struck him Blinky fought back. He knew that detectives were not idly to be tampered with, but this man appeared no larger than his own meager proportions. Moreover, there was that pressure beneath his arm-pit warning him that in case he were caught he could expect no mercy from the law. He struggled desperately.

But as happens sometimes to the best of men, he struggled vainly. In some mysterious manner he landed sprawling on his knees upon the floor and the next moment he found his neck bent down and his arms up in a merciless half-nelson.

"'Nough!" groaned Blinky. "You got me all right."

His captor chuckled softly.

"Now, damn you!" he said, his voice breaking from the low laugh into sudden fierceness. "Are you through or will I have to wring your miserable neck before I let you up?"

"You're breaking it now," gasped Blinky. "For God's sake, let me breathe!"

The other laughed again somewhat breathlessly and slowly released his grip. Blinky rose to his feet and surveyed his captor, rubbing his aching neck the while. The light from the gas-jet farther up the stairs fell full on his own face, but made a shadow of his captor's. All he could make out was a figure proportioned about like his own, but with a suggestive bulging of the coat over each shoulder that took the heart out of him.

"Blinky, you yellow dog!" said the detective. "I'm going to get a raise at your expense. Stand still there, or I'll bust you in two. That's better. Bah, don't make any starts at *me!*"

As Blinky showed signs of restiveness the detective swung his hand like a flash and slapped his captive smartly across the face. Blinky shrank back against the railing of the stairs and cowered. His heart was sinking rapidly.

"Hey, you!" muttered Blinky. "Look here. I got two fifty. I'll split it half and half. What say?"

The detective grinned. Even in the shadow Blinky could see it and his heart fell.

"None o' that stuff," said the officer, his expression changing suddenly. "I'll take it all in the name of the law."

Blinky stared at him dully.

"Turn around here," continued the mild little detective, "or I'll knock your block off, hear me?"

Blinky turned obediently with his hands still in the air and the pressure of the roll of bills heavy over his heart. Perhaps it was this pressure and still more the weight of the automatic under his arm which nerved him to action now. For he felt the

patting of the detective's hands along his hips. To be found with a concealed weapon in his possession meant more than the money which was on him. A long term confronted him. He thought of Sing Sing and he thought of Blackwell's Island.

"I'm a family man, Blinky," the detective was saying. "This means something to me. Turn a bit to the left. Left. Ha! None of—*damn you!*" cried the detective and his hand flew to his pocket.

Blinky fired.

A short outcry answered his shot. He did not wait to make sure of his game, but fled down the stairs and into the street. He paused a crouching instant at the door to make sure that there was no bar of waiting detectives in sight. Then he raced directly across the street and down the opposite alley.

Before he reached the next streets he recollected himself. He stopped, took off his hat and smoothed his hair, arranged his necktie and settled his clothes. Then he stepped out jauntily enough into the penetrating light of the street lamps.

His mind was fully made up. Within a few hours the call would be out for him. He remembered Blackwell's Island under the swart shadow of the Queensboro Bridge, and his blood went cold.

He turned back now toward the Bowery and caught a Fourth Avenue car. At Forty-Second Street and Madison Avenue he got off and went into the Grand Central Station. It seemed to him that when he asked for the New York to Chicago time-table the man at the information-stand looked at him sharply. All the world would seem to have sharp eyes upon him now, thought Blinky, and he shivered slightly.

The train would not leave for an hour. He went out of the station and crossed the street to the Belmont bar. He sat at a table with the time-table clutched in one hand; and as the waiter took the order once more Blinky felt the surveillance of keen eyes. He drank his first brandy straight and hardly felt the burn of it. The second he filled to the brim with seltzer and sipped to kill time. He dared not befuddle his brain with alcohol at a time like this.

At last he sat in the train, heard the last calls, and the train pulled roaring down the subway.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE WILDS.

IT was to Blinky as if he had left his native land for a foreign shore. With a typical New Yorker's sense, Chicago was to him merely "somewhere in the West," a vague city of smoke, overhung with the souls of slaughtered cattle. Further than Chicago his thought could not strike. And as he sat in the seat he turned sadly in his mind the various periods and episodes of his life.

It had all been bounded by Manhattan; the East River on one side and the Hudson on the other. Once in a long while during the hot months he had taken a girl for a long boat ride up the Hudson, but these were daring voyages of adventure and discovery, vying with the exploits of those old Vikings who forestalled Columbus half a millennium.

And now he was venturing into those wilds where the hills had hardly forgotten the war cries of the Indians. Blinky Meyers was sad indeed. And by the time he reached Chicago his gloom had become a crying homesickness. He had no care where he went now. He wandered idly through the streets until he came to the first policeman.

This sight startled Blinky. He had almost forgotten that there might be policemen in far-away Chicago. He changed his course and, after a time, managed to hunt out a resort whose doors swung continually with the entering and outgoing stream of pleasure-seekers. There were sailors, soldiers, longshoremen in the crowd. They were pleasant to the familiar eye of Blinky. Here he could lose himself among his fellows.

The sense of relief was too much for his overstrained nerves. He had not slept on the train that night, nor in the morning. Now he relaxed all care.

He found a table in a corner and commenced on his favorite brandy. The rattling of an electric piano lulled and lured

him. His guard fell lower and lower. And now the drinks called strongly for repetition. He kept his glass filled constantly.

There is something in the oily substance of old brandy which makes it slow of effect, but its effect is no less sure; and consequently, the time came oversoon when Blinky Meyers, pale and vacant of eye, stared at the piano, wondered whence this heavenly music could come, and uttered his order slowly and with careful lips.

It was in such a state that a fellow of his own order found him. He sat at Blinky's table after asking if his company were permissible.

It was more than that. It was vastly welcome, according to Blinky. So the stranger sat down. He, too, it seemed, was partial to brandy, and if the drinks he poured for himself were strangely small, they were made large at once with seltzer and they were drunk with a gusto which equalled Blinky's. Furthermore, if these drinks were paid for from Blinky's roll, why, that was only just. The best of good fellows have their low moments.

So Blinky grew mellow and mellower, and confident and more confiding, and he talked of Manhattan, and of the procession of bridges over the East River, and of the Woolworth at night, and of the crossing of Forty-Second Street and Fifth Avenue in the day, and always he was met with sympathetic gutturals. The stranger had little to say, but he seemed to understand, and understanding was all that Blinky's soul craved.

The understanding, in fact, became so perfect that the last Blinky knew he was making an uncertain progress over a sidewalk which shifted and wavered as strangely as a sea in a storm, and leaning upon the arm of this new-found friend, who was urging and supporting him toward a haven of rest.

He awoke in the haven of rest the next day at noon. His head was dizzy from the sun which slanted through a cracked window. The buzzing of flies filled his brain with delirium. He woke further enough to raise his sick head. He was lying with all his clothes on. The sight woke him to the realization that his clothes were irking him with a thousand itching and rubbing wrinkles. He rose with a swimming sickness and ventured as far as the wash-stand. The water in the flowered pitcher was tepid and dirty, but when he dipped an end of the wrinkled towel in it it was heaven to his forehead and sweeter heaven to his throat and the back of his neck. He reeled now before the mirror.

The sight of the unshaven and flushed face which looked back at him was disconcerting. Then as the memory of the past evening came back he went with a doubt to search his clothes.

His premonitions were sadly fulfilled. The rolls of bills from his vest-pockets had disappeared. In his trouser-pockets he found a little over a dollar in change. His automatic was safe, however. Probably the thief had been afraid to keep it.

In New York the loss of his money would have made him rather angry than sad. In Chicago it made him feel like a mariner stranded upon a desert island. Through his head fleeted prospects of labor at the docks, of shoveling coal, of various sad and distasteful sights which he had seen. The soul of Blinky Meyers shrank like an apple under the summer sun. He grew flabby.

But it served at least to sober him somewhat, and as he sobered his mind began to work more actively. Joined to the activity of his mind was his depression, both physical and mental; the aftermath of too much liquor from the day before. The first thing that bore in upon him was the consciousness that he was the object of the law's anger. The thought suggested further flight.

This idea came to fill his mind more and more. He consulted the meager change in his pocket and his heart fell again. He even thought of appealing to the police to apprehend the man who had filched his money. The thought on reconsideration made him laugh aloud, and the laughter in turn made his head ache.

He went down into the street and invested in the first saloon in a gin-fizz. This stimulus encouraged him toward a breakfast which he made for twenty-five cents in a lunch-room on a couple of boiled eggs and coffee. The soul of Blinky Meyers com-

menced to revive, but his fears revived at the same time with surprising violence. The fact that he had made the journey from New York to Chicago in a day made the distance seem to him a mere step. He must move on.

"Westward the course of empire—" Blinky Meyers boarded a west-bound freight.

Half a day out a braky discovered him. He demanded a dollar for the privilege of riding the train on that section. Blinky dug miserably into his pocket and found little better than half that sum. The braky received it with manifest scorn and after pocketing the sum kicked Blinky ignominiously off the grade. The train had just started and Blinky rolled a great way down the cinders, cut and scraped and bruised by his fall.

He rose, sick at heart, and went back to the station to wait his fortunes with the next freight. He sat upon a pile of tiles near the station, pulling his derby deep over his eyes.

He succeeded in catching that freight, but the next two days were merely variations of hell for him. Brakies on Western divisions are apt to be harsh. Blinky was a proper object for their harshness. To their words he responded with silence. To their blows he cringed, which is not the way of a proper tramp. And they enjoyed the novelty to the full of their strong vocabularies and their still more wonderfully stronger good right toes.

So it chanced that Blinky, bruised, shaken, and sore in a thousand places, reached Weatherby Gap and was booted farther than common by a braky of most uncommon vocabulary and leg power. He wiped the cinders from his cut cheek and scraped eyebrows before he rose and looked upon the wilderness around him.

It was a singularly bleak country; bald, scalped mountains shot up on all sides with a struggling growth of evergreens climbing their sides. Flags of mist whipped from the peaks and a low wind hummed through the shrubbery. It was as sad as death to Blinky, but death itself was not so sad as the toes of angered brakies. Blinky turned his back upon the railroad station and surveyed the scene gloomily. What lay in the wilderness he had not the least idea. But there was a road, and the road promised human habitation sooner or later.

The idea of physical labor was still mightily distasteful to him, but not so distasteful as the journeying hell of freight trains. A virtuous resolve filled Blinky's mind and he turned resolutely down the road and into the shades of the trees.

It was late in the afternoon. The shadows began to slip, cool and splotchy, through the trees and the gnats and flies, which had gone zipping through the warmer air all day, settled now in sleepy droves close to the ground, but roused themselves at the presence of Blinky to follow him steadfastly along the road.

He had to cut a twig from a tree and as he marched he kept the twig playing about his face to brush away the annoyance. But as he walked the grime and grit accumulated from his days in the box-cars bothered him more and more. So that when he saw the glint of water through the trees it was a passing pleasing sight to him.

He stopped a moment to enjoy the gray-green shimmer of the water between the tree-trunks. Then he stepped from the road and into the forest. He found the pool a few rods deep in the wood. It was formed by the angle of an inconsiderable brook which kept up a continual chattering through the afternoon hush, Blinky stooped to try the water with his hand. Lo! It was as mild and warm as the air of that summer day.

What with the flies and the grit his mind was made up on the spot. He threw off his clothes hastily and stepped into the water. Gathering courage he made a long dive. He came up safely and then he started paddling about. The water caught and slid on his shoulders pleasantly. He tried floating on his back for a while and managed it passably well, though the fresh water did not buoy him as the salt water to which he was accustomed. He had to paddle hard with the extended hands to keep afloat.

Perhaps it was the noise of this paddling that covered the approach of the other man. At any rate, as Blinky floated and paddled

he started at the sound of a voice behind him.

"Ah, there, partner!"

CHAPTER III.

MARKSMANSHIP.

BLINKY quite forgot that he was in the water and started erect. Luckily the water was shallow and he stood with the cool waves lapping about his breast. Through the patched filtering of the sunlight he made out the figure of a man on a horse. Very gross and huge it seemed to Blinky as he stood in the pool.

The water chilled him all at once. Perhaps this was some messenger of the law come thus upon his trail. For the law was to Blinky a fearsome and mysterious agent whose arms reached everywhere and whose heads were more numerous than chimera.

"Are you dumb?" repeated the voice, a little sharply this time.

"Dumb?" said Blinky. "Sure, I ain't."

"Come on out then and talk to me," said the forbidding horseman. "I'm lonely and want company."

Blinky paddled obediently out from the water, and as he did so the horseman dismounted. Blinky stood shivering in the chill air with his arms wrapped vainly around him.

"How 'n hell d'you come here?" inquired the rider.

Blinky swallowed before he could answer.

"I dunno," he said, "I just happened along."

The horseman chuckled.

"I reckon you did," he said in his heavy voice. "Better put on your clothes before you freeze. Are these yours?"

He leaned over the heap at his feet.

"Hallo!" he cried a moment later. "What's this?"

The stranger held the bundle of Blinky's clothes at arms' length. Then he dropped them all save the trousers.

"Look here, pardner," he grinned to Blinky. "Are these sure enough pants? Why, the legs ain't much bigger 'n the sleeves of my shirt!"

The trousers were sadly wrinkled and soiled, but they still showed the latest slender New York cut. Blinky shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

"And this here," continued the rider, abandoning the trousers and picking up Blinky's battered derby. "Say, Billy, where'd you come from that they let you wander around in things like this? Is this a hat?"

Blinky flushed under the scorn of the question.

"Of course it is," he said angrily. "Of course it's a hat."

"Aw, go on," grinned the rider, "it ain't more 'n a grape-fruit skin with a rim. What?"

He dropped the hat and picked up the coat, letting one hand fall down the cut in line of the side. As he did so he started with a different interest.

"H-m!" said the horseman, fumbling through the coat. "You carry your badge with you, what?"

Blinky saw the glint of metal in his hand. His heart sank. His automatic had been discovered. He cursed himself inwardly for not throwing it away long before.

"What's this here?" continued the stranger. "Is it a toy gun?"

Blinky took up his clothes and started to dress.

"It's a gun, I guess," he admitted.

The other spread the gun on the palm of one hand and Blinky could see that his weapon was the object of a long and careful scrutiny.

"Yes," said the stranger, "I reckon it's a gun all right, but does it really shoot?"

An enforced silence followed as Blinky struggled his head through his shirt.

He hadn't much idea as to whether it would still shoot or not. He had only used it once since he possessed it, and that once was the cause of his sudden exodus into these parts unknown.

"I guess it shoots all right," he said.

The stranger sighed deeply.

"It's sure strange," he observed at last. "I reckon this here science is a pretty wonderful thing, all right. But, say, could this here little gun really hurt a man?"

Blinky shuddered in reminiscence.

"It can do that," he said.

"I ain't disputing you," said the other, "but speakin' of guns—"

As he spoke he reached a hand behind him and it came forth again bearing a long, blue-barreled Colt.

"Speakin' of guns," he went on, "this here is what I've always called a man-killer, an' I didn't know there was any other brand goin' that would really do the work."

Blinky was sitting on a log tying his shoes, but he looked up at this remark and watched with fascinated eyes as the rider whirled his big gun on his forefinger. He felt that he was before a denizen of another world in the presence of this big-shouldered man with the broad-brimmed hat slouched back far on his head. His mustache thrust out straight from the end of his nose and then dropped at a sharp angle toward his chin. He was framed by the equally brawny horse which loomed behind.

"Still," said the stranger, "here's what looks to be a barrel, and though it's a pretty small caliber, it might do damage. Here's what looks to be a handle, though it fits mighty small into a man's hand."

He remained a moment studying the automatic.

"How'd you come by such a gun as this here one?" he asked sharply.

Blinky Meyers winced.

"I just come across it," he said slowly.

"And how do you happen to be along here?" continued the other. "You ain't got any deputy sheriff badge about you. What?" There was no mistaking the ominous touch in his voice as he said this.

"Sheriff badge?" queried Blinky tremulously. "No, I'm afraid I haven't."

The big man strode to him and tilted his head back with one ponderous hand. Then he chuckled.

"No," said he, "I reckon you ain't no deputy."

"Is it forbidden to carry guns out here?" continued Blinky humbly, thinking that he might plead ignorance of the laws.

"Aw, I don't know," growled the other, but there was a hint of good nature in his voice now. "I never seen one carried the place you got it in. Under the arm-pit, huh?"

"Yes," said Blinky, "I thought that was the place to carry it."

The rider pushed his hat still farther back on his head as he scratched his head in his thoughtfulness.

"It may be the right place to carry it in some sections, but not out here, not that I've seen much," he said. "Say, how 'd you get it out for a quick draw? Suppose a man was ridin' up on you from behind and you wanted to get him quick as soon as you heard him, and you didn't hear him none too soon, how'd you get him with a gun stowed away under there?" He gestured toward the pit of his arm.

"I don't know," said Blinky, quite awe-stricken. "I never tried to get a man that way."

The stranger watched him a moment and then burst into a heavy laugh.

"No," he said, "I reckon you never did. Wall, this is sure the funniest gun I ever seen. You don't mean to tell me it shoots straight, huh?"

"I think it does," said Blinky, and sighed at the memory.

The other looked at him a bit uncertainly. "I'm thinkin' of stayin' here a while tonight, maybe campin' here till mornin'," he said. "I been travelin' a long while already. I reckon you'll stay with me. What?"

It was more a decision of his own than a question, and the explosive violence of his last queried word somewhat shocked Blinky.

"Camping here?" asked Blinky in amazement. "Why, there ain't any bed here, is there?"

The stranger laughed shortly.

"Sure, there ain't," he said, "but I got the makin' of a sort of a meal behind my saddle there. I reckon horse-blankets will keep us warm. What?"

The novelty of the proposal and the rather strangely decided manner of the big man were too much for Blinky.

"Me?" he said at last. "No, I guess I'll move on. There must be a town around here, ain't there?"

The rider greeted this remark with a short silence.

"I reckon there is," he said at last.

"Then I think I'll be moving on," said

Blinky, who was beginning to feel more and more uncomfortable.

He rose from the log as he spoke and started casting about in his mind for the proper adieus to his singular companion.

"Wait a minute," said the other, stretching out his arm, though not touching Blinky. "Here we are leavin' one another, and not knowin' each other's names. That's hardly companionable, is it? What?"

"I guess not," said Blinky.

"Then what might be your name, partner?" asked the rider bluntly.

"It might be Meyers," said Blinky cautiously. "Does that mean anything to you?"

The stranger pondered the name.

"Not a thing," he said at last with apparent relief in his voice. Then he leaned forward toward Blinky. "And supposin' my name was Donahue," he went on, "would that mean anything to you?"

"Nothing at all," said Blinky cheerfully, for he began to feel that he had to do with one of his own feather. "Not a thing, pal."

He waited for a response, but got none.

"If I could bother you for my little gun—" he began tentatively.

"There's one thing more," said the other, "not that I have any hankerin' for the gun; but say, what sort of a color would you say that there horse of mine is?"

"That horse?" queried Blinky. "I suppose I'd call him a big, raw-boned roan, eh?"

The stranger shook his head with emphasis.

"And you're looking for the town tonight—maybe for El Dorado?"

"The nearest one, whatever it is," assented Blinky.

"I reckon it wouldn't do for you to go into that town and say you met a man who rode a big roan horse," said the rider. "You see, there's a lot of folks in that there town of El Dorado that are a lot more curious than what's good for them to be; and if you told them that, they might just naturally start out and look for that there horse. You see?"

Blinky stared at him vaguely, a glimmer of comprehension beginning to come to him.

"Besides," said the stranger more pleasantly, "I'd kind of like to have company to-night, it bein' powerful lonesome 'way out here in the forest and the mountains. What?"

"I suppose it is," said Blinky politely.

"And you suppose right," said Donahue —"so I have an idea that you'll stay here with me and have supper with me, which I'll cook. And afterward we'll talk maybe about this little gun of yours which has sort of took my eye, so to speak."

There was no doubting his intentions by this time, and Blinky, with an inward tremor, resigned himself to his fate.

But beyond the fact that the rider kept the automatic stowed away in his hip pocket, his actions were wholly cordial toward Blinky. He himself cut the first dried branches into slivers and lighted them with a match. It was he who fanned them carefully to a blaze and then piled on twigs and branches until a cozy little fire burned up. It was he who produced a large piece of bacon and sliced it deftly with a pocket knife; he again who brought forth a heavy loaf of bread and then a tin and coffee. The only commission which was left for Blinky to execute was to bring the water for the coffee.

Blinky forgot a large portion of his fears while the fire was burning and while the odor of the broiling bacon, which sizzled on the point of a stick, filled the air, and still more when the steam of the coffee joined the other fragrances. The rider made no fearsome moves, and even sang snatches of popular songs in a broken voice—songs which Blinky had heard years before in the theaters of New York. They touched him to the heart, and a thousand tender memories of old Manhattan choked him while the big man sang.

He himself made other offerings later on. They were later songs, and they were sung in a somewhat mellower voice. The rider listened in fascinated attention.

After they had eaten sandwiches of bread and bacon, the bread sadly old and tough, and the bacon sadly burned, and

drunk their portion of bitter coffee, Blinky gave himself wholly to the spirit of music, for he had lost much of his awe of the rider by this time. He lay back with his head pillowed on a small log, watched the leap and shimmer of the last sunlight on the water beyond and how the smoke shook up in swift jags of blue-white past the stiff-shafted pine-trees. So he sang and whistled a score of tunes he had heard and danced to in New York, and the larger man leaned with his elbow fallen on his knee and beat time with a ponderous hand to the rhythm of the tunes.

Afterward there came a little silence, and Blinky Meyers found himself lying back and wondering up to the swart trees and over their spear-pointing tops to the pink-tinted blue of the sky. A silver wraith of mist blew over the eastern pines, and after it came the moon, round and white with the mist dissolving from its face.

"There's one thing I still got to talk about," broke in Donahue at last.

Blinky drew himself up on one elbow and frowned at his companion, half irritated and half frightened.

"It's about this here shootin' iron," said Donahue. "Leastwise you claim it shoots. What?"

"Sure it does," assented Blinky.

"Huh," grunted Donahue. "Any objection to me tryin' it out?"

"Where?" grinned Blinky. "On these trees?"

Donahue regarded him with compassion.

"Naw," he said. "Look at these here pebbles all around. They're white and bright. Suppose you throw 'em up in the air, and I'll try what this here gun of yours can do."

Blinky sat up to stare.

"Why," he cried, "these pebbles wouldn't be no more than little points of light to shoot at."

Donahue cleared his throat modestly and covered his face with his hand to hide his smile.

"That's all I need to shoot at, partner," he said. "You try me out, and if I miss it 'll be your gun's fault, not mine."

He fondled the gun as he spoke and balanced the handle in the palm of his hand.

"All right," answered Blinky. "Here's for you."

But he stopped with the pebble in his hand and pointed suddenly.

"Look!" he said. "There's something worth shooting at. Can you hit that?"

Slipping with furtive movements from the roots of a tree toward the edge of the pool came a chipmunk a short distance away.

"Wall, damn me," whispered the rider, "the little feller's come down to get a drink. What?"

He made no move toward pointing the gun.

"Give it to me," said Blinky, his thin face hardening and a strange smile coming on his lips. "I think I could hit it. Let me try. Let me try!"

He kept his eyes hungrily on the chipmunk as he stretched out his hand toward the gun. Consequently he did not note the sudden curling of the rider's mouth.

"Not a hope," said the rider softly. "Why, that there poor little devil may have a family stowed away in these here trees somewhere. Maybe he's come a long way for that drink. What?"

"Ain't you going to shoot?" demanded Blinky impatiently, turning toward his companion.

"Nor you ain't, neither," said the larger man. "I done a lot of shootin' in my day, maybe, but I ain't never done it yet for the fun of killin'. What?"

Blinky stared at him without a flicker of understanding in his eyes. The face of the rider had softened, and his eyes moved away from Blinky.

"There," he said, "he's gone back to his mammy and his kids."

Blinky turned and saw a disappearing stir of brown fur among the roots of the trees.

"Well," he sighed, "you're sure a funny guy, all right. Want to try on these pebbles now?"

"All right," assented the rider. "I'll use the Colt first and get my eye. Haven't done much shootin' lately."

He laid aside the automatic and picked up the long-barreled revolver.

Blinky tossed a pebble into the air. As

it started on its downward course the gun exploded in Donahue's hand and the pebble disappeared.

"That was luck!" cried Blinky, unable to believe the testimony of his eyes. "You can't do it again."

Donahue merely smiled. "Throw again," he said, and when the pebble was tossed he fired again, and once more the pebble disappeared.

Donahue was beginning to grow interested. He rose to his feet, and Blinky did the same. He had quite forgotten his fear in his admiration for this superhuman marksmanship. Pebble after pebble he tossed into the air, and every time Donahue struck his mark. Five times he repeated this, and on the last shot he turned and cried to Blinky: "Watch this whirl, partner!"

As Blinky tossed up the pebble the gunman threw his revolver into the air. It flashed in a couple of rapid circles, and as it struck in the hand of the marksman it exploded. Again the pebble disappeared.

Blinky shivered in the earnestness of his interest.

"My God," he said softly, after a moment of pause, "that's not human. I can't believe that!"

The gunman grinned.

"Nothin' at all," he said. "Now let's see what your toy gun can do."

He dropped the Colt and picked up the automatic, fingering it cautiously.

"Fits snug in the hollow of the hand, all right, doesn't it?" he said.

He made the gesture of drawing and aiming it half a dozen times.

"Throw a pebble," he directed.

Blinky tossed the pebble, and again the pebble disappeared as the gun exploded.

"By God!" cried the gunman in admiration as he looked down to the shining little weapon. "She shoots true, all right. Nice, clean kick, too. Try again!"

Again he struck the pebble.

"And now what 'll she do on the flip, eh?"

"Try it," said Blinky.

"I ain't much used to the hang of it yet," said the gunman dubiously, "but here's where I learn."

He tossed the automatic high as Blinky threw the pebble, and the gun exploded as it reached his hand again. But to Blinky's astonishment the pebble fell untouched. He saw it rattle on a stone a few yards away. Then he turned his worried eye to the marksman.

Donahue had staggered back against a tree, and stood with his head strained back and his hands clutching at his breast. Blinky shrank close to the ground.

CHAPTER IV.

"DEAD OR ALIVE."

DONAHUE reeled a bit forward and fell horribly near the fire. Blinky Meyers reached him at a leap, and dragged the heavy body a foot or more away with infinite labor. Then he managed to turn him up his back, and the soiled and leaf-straggled face looked up to him, grinning with pain.

"Scragged on my oldest an' my best stunt," moaned Donahue, with a painful breath between each word, "an' all along o' your damned new gun. It sure can shoot. I'm the everlastin' witness o' that."

A fresh contortion of pain silenced him, and he closed his eyes, fighting against the desire to cry out.

Blinky began fumbling clumsily at Donahue's breast. The latter cursed and thrust him strongly away.

"No use," he said; "I'm through, all right. What a hell of a place to die in! I thought it 'd be a barroom, anyway, with the odds ag'in' me. What a hell of a place to die in, here with the stars watchin'! What?"

He broke off to laugh. The sound broke and bubbled horribly.

"Think of it, will you?" he demanded in a hoarse whisper when he had recovered. "They're electin' a constable at El Dorado to-morrow to go out an' catch me, an' I reckon they'll be a powerful few that 'll want the job. Think where they'll find me—what a hell of a place to have to die in!"

The words trailed into a groan, and he lay for a moment with closed eyes.

"Water," he said after a moment without opening his eyes. "Damn you, don't you see I'm burnin' up?"

Blinky grabbed the coffee-pot and rushed to the edge of the pool, where he hastily emptied the grounds, rinsed the can, and started back with it full of tepid water. Half-way back he stopped short, for he saw the big roan, which Donahue had unsaddled and tethered by the lariat to a tree, rear back on his tether. There was a sharp, gritting sound as the rope-knot slipped and then came free, and the big roan turned and walked with pausing feet toward his master's fallen body.

It came over Blinky with a rush of horror that perhaps the charger would trample the fallen body. He could not move, but waited to watch. For how could he stand against this giant beast? But when the horse came to Donahue he dropped his head, with the ears flattened close to his neck, and stood with his fore legs spread and his nostrils hardly an inch from the fallen man's face. He drew back a pace or two after that and stamped and tossed his head to break into a whinny that rang through the trees.

Blinky remembered his mission, and ran toward Donahue.

He found the wounded man muttering continually like a dreamer in his sleep, for his eyes were still closed.

"Partner," he said, opening his eyes as the can touched his lips, "if I was goin' to live I'd stake you rich for doin' this."

He drank deeply, Blinky supporting his head.

He fell back rather contentedly after that, his eyes opening and closing between breaths as if he were fighting against an overpowering sleepiness.

"Where's Sammy?" he asked. "Him and me's been pals a long while."

A step came behind Blinky, and a great head thrust past his shoulder. It was the roan.

"Hello, Sammy!" muttered the gunman. "Ain't this a hell of a place for me to die in—what? Think of all the places you an' me has been!"

The roan leaned his head still closer, and his ears pricked as if he were intent on hearing every word. So the man and the horse stood side by side to watch the coming of death. Once Blinky turned toward the roan with almost a feeling of fear, for it seemed to him that a human personality was watching there at his side and looking out of the round, bright eyes.

The wounded man stirred again, and moved out one hand to touch the velvety nose of the roan, which was standing just above him.

"Sammy—" he began, and then broke off, and his hand dropped. He was quiet for another moment. "Partner," he said after a little, and his voice was faint but quite clear, "do I know you well enough to ask you a favor? What?"

Blinky knelt suddenly, and his voice choked. "Anything this side of hell," he whispered with sudden emotion.

"All right," said the gunman; "it ain't anything much, except that I sort of hate to have 'em find me in this hell of a hole, me that have lived so wide and free, sort of—what? Well, I want you to drag me off somewhere through the trees here, an' scrape out a bit of a hole in the dirt an' roll me in there where they'll never find me. What? You could sink me in the pool, but that 'd poison the water when some poor devil comes here wantin' a drink. Will you do this?"

"I will," said Blinky tremulously.

"Say it again," said the gunman insistently.

"So help me God!" murmured Blinky.

Donahue smiled and then groaned. In the flicker of the fire Blinky could see the glisten of the sweat that stood on the dying man's forehead. It filled him with awe to see this courage in the face of death. He thought back into his own pale soul and shuddered.

"One more thing," said Donahue. "This here roan—this here Sammy—you c'n see him, can't you? My eyes are gettin' pretty thick. Hey, Sammy!"

The head of the big roan stooped close over Donahue, and his hand moved up uncertainly and touched the wide-spreading nostrils. Then he sighed, and his hand fell again.

"Sammy an' me has been pals," he said.

"Seems a sort of a shame that any other man should back him savin' me. I broke him when none of the rest of them could. I lassoed him. I saddled him. All by myself. He was a hell-bender, was Sammy, then. He was four that spring. You should of seen him. What?"

He closed his eyes and smiled. The thought was pleasant.

"Shame that any one else should ride him. What?" he went on feebly. "Shame that any one should spur him after he gets old, me being dead. What?"

"Yes, yes," muttered Blinky, stammering, for the tears, despite himself, were running fast down his face and tickled on his chin.

"It ain't much that I want you to do, seein' that you see that. What?" said the gunman.

"No," said Blinky miserably.

"I'd ask you to shoot Sammy so's no one else could ever back him," went on Donahue, his voice growing more and more uncertain; "but I know you'd lose heart for it when you seen him lookin' down the line of your barrel with his ears stuck forward. But use him well, pal. What?"

Blinky turned and looked into the big eyes near him.

"Yes," he said after a moment of pause, and then repeated the order to himself. "Sure I will."

Donahue raised his hand slightly, and Blinky slipped his own more tremulous fingers within it. The pressure in return was cold and feeble.

"Partner," said the gunman, "you're O. K. So-long."

After that he was quiet for a long time. Blinky thought once that he had died, but he remembered that when men die their eyes open. So he waited on. It would be a fearful time, he thought, when this big man's eyes should open at last and look to the stars. At the thought he raised his head to note what they would see in that last long glance. There were the stars indeed, but pale in the white circle of the moon. And the moon itself drew softly westward toward the pine-tops with the thin tangle of mist before its face. The dying man stirred again.

"Sammy," he whispered, "a hell of a place—to die in—you an' me—what?"

He drew a quick breath. Blinky knew that he was dead as well as if a voice had spoken in his ear. The eyes rolled open. It was astonishingly and terribly like a calm awakening in the morning. Instinctively Blinky reached out a hand and commenced to stroke the shining neck of the roan.

His thoughts were coming fast and confusedly now as he looked down to the leonine face of the dead man. He remembered another he had seen in a Hester Street barroom. The man had been standing at the bar feeling a little but clinging fast to the edge with one hand while he balanced his glass in the other. Then the glass had dropped, cracking and splashing noisily. And the man fell at the same moment with a breath which was half gurgle and half hiss. They made a sudden circle around him. But he writhed and kicked so vigorously that they could not put a hand on him. It was a fearful thing to watch.

Blinky had seen a mad dog shot and die in convulsions. This man in the barroom had reminded him horribly of it. It seemed as if he were fighting against death as he lay face downward, twisting and cursing. Then he stopped moving, said "God!" and then lay in a crumpled heap. When they straightened the body and turned it face up, the sight of it made Blinky weak and sick at the stomach.

He closed his eyes and thought of this. He opened his eyes and looked on the big man who lay dead before him. A flicker from the firelight touched his face and the steady smile on it, and lighted the wide eyes. Blinky trembled, and then reached out with a faltering hand and closed those eyes. It was too ghostly otherwise.

It was a long while before he gathered strength and courage to drag the big man away and half bury him as he had been requested. At last he got up and slipped his arms under the limp shoulders. The weight of the body astonished him. It was obvious that he could not drag the body far.

He let it slowly down again and sat on a log to consider. The horror and the solemnity of the moment was dying out from

Blinky's mind. His thoughts commenced to revert to their usual channels. A dead man was but a dead man. If he had valuables upon him, they could do him no good. And he, Blinky, was desperately broke and in a country to which he was totally strange.

He commenced the search rather reluctantly. In a trouser-pocket a slight crinkling sound as he stirred the cloth roused him as the scent of game rouses the well-bred hunting dog. He brought forth a compact roll of bills.

Blinky hummed while he counted the money. One hundred and eighty-five dollars lay in his hand. He slapped the money carelessly across his knee and smiled benevolently upon the dead man. Afterward he continued the search of the dead man's clothes.

In the breast pocket of the shirt he found another roll of paper, and again his heart thrilled. But when he brought it out he found it to be merely a sort of folded poster. He would have torn it up or thrown it away, save that as he unfolded it his eyes caught what seemed to be the picture of a man.

Blinky stirred up the fire, and by that light examined the picture more closely. It was beyond a doubt the picture of the dead man dressed in his present costume, with the same wide-brimmed hat pushed back from the forehead. Then, as he unrolled the paper still more, Blinky saw in great type:

REWARD!

Blinky rubbed his chin and stared without being able to read more of the poster for a moment. Then he read on:

REWARD! FIFTEEN HUNDRED DOLLARS! REWARD!

For the Person of "Sandy" Donahue, Dead or Alive.

Any person or persons whatsoever are hereby authorized to bring the body of Sandy Donahue, in any way whatsoever, into the hands of the law, and claim therefor a reward of fifteen hundred dollars.

To this there is added a private subscription of five hundred dollars from individuals not named, and three hundred dollars more from Mr. J. J. Binkersdorf, of El Dorado. A total reward of twenty-three hundred dollars is therefore offered for the apprehension of Sandy Donahue, dead or alive.

For acts of murder, for robbery, plunder, and other acts of violence, Sandy Donahue has become a menace to the public safety.

In person the outlaw is between five feet eleven and six feet tall, wears the clothes customary to a cattle ranger, with a wide sombrero with a heavy silver braid around it. He rides a large horse of a roan color. There are no peculiar markings on his face. He has a long mustache of a light color, and his whole complexion is light.

He had to read it over to himself three or four times, and at last say it aloud before he quite understood his great fortune. It was almost too good to be true. Blinky Meyers sighed and leaned over to make sure. Yes, there could be no doubt of it. He remembered several hints which the outlaw had dropped during their conversation that afternoon. It was quite plain now. This was why he did not wish Blinky to go back to El Dorado and mention a big roan horse and a man with a mustache.

Suddenly Blinky crumpled the poster and threw it from him. He laughed long and loud, and with such enthusiasm that he fell into a strangling chuckle at the end.

He remembered now well enough how he had been thrown out of a saloon back in Monkey Hill, in good old Manhattan. He remembered a thousand painful incidents of humiliation scattered throughout his life, and not least of all the contemptuous cuffing which he had received from the plain-clothes man as he fled down the stairs that last night. And now—

Blinky again burst into laughter. He reached out a foot and stirred the dead outlaw slightly. Now Blinky Meyers had done a service to the State. At least no man would ever know otherwise. Now Blinky Meyers would be a hero among heroes, a slayer of the slayers.

Blinky's mind went blank with wonder for an instant. He raised his face to the wide arch of the sky. It rolled vastly upon his struggling mind, now, the possibility of this huge and naked West, where nature bulks big and man-made scenery is contemptible. All was a great gamble there. And at the first throw of the dice Blinky

had won. He kept his face turned up for a long moment to the sky. It was the most solemn moment in Blinky's life.

CHAPTER V.

IN EL DORADO.

AFTER that he started to work systematically. With some reluctance he refolded the yellowbacks and stuffed them into the pocket of the dead man's trousers.

His next effort was the saddling of the roan. This was hard. He had to guess at some of the buckles, but he finally drew the cinch as hard as his strength permitted and knotted the loose strap-end to the best of his ability. Next he led the roan to the body of Donahue.

He fixed the loop of the lariat under the arms of the dead man and passed it over the pommel of the saddle. Then came the hardest part. He had to stop sometimes and draw his breath, but in the end he managed to lift and draw Donahue to the saddle. He fastened him lying face downward behind the saddle over the roan's broad hips. Then he climbed to the saddle and started down the road in the direction Donahue had pointed—toward El Dorado.

He found out later that it was eight miles he traveled that night. It seemed thrice as long to him. Once or twice he started to trot, but the horrible jouncing of the corpse behind the saddle revolted him, and he came back to the roan's long pacing stride. The road swung through the hills and came abruptly out onto a limitless plain. Blinky thought he had never seen so wide a sky nor colder stars farther away from him.

Underfoot the road gave back a sandy crunching to the step of Sammy. So they went on for two hours and a half until, as they topped a little rise of the road, Blinky saw a huddling heap of houses before him.

As he came closer he made out a little group of buildings along what was evidently the village's one street. They were mostly completely dark. The largest place, however, was brighty lighted. It was a timber building fronted with hitching racks at which stood a row of down-headed saddle horses, evidently victims of a long wait in the night.

They sidled hastily apart and stood with pricking ears when Blinky rode in among them and dismounted to tether his mount. Then he walked with some trepidation to the door, from behind which issued the unmistakable clatter of bar fixtures and the rumble and stir of human voices.

It was a timid and faltering Blinky Meyers who put his hand on the knob of that door. It was another man who stepped inside and looked about the brightly lighted room with his usual pale-eyed stare. For it suddenly occurred to him that these were doubtless the very men who stood in awe of "Sandy" Donahue. These were the men whom he had defied with impunity. And behold! he had ridden into this town on Donahue's roan with the body of the bandit behind his own saddle.

His entrance had been the sign for no disturbance. Only one man turned his head; but when he saw Blinky his expression changed partly to puzzled attention and partly to amusement. He nudged his neighbor, who in turn looked, but he, lacking his fellow's restraint, burst into a hearty laugh as soon as he caught sight of Blinky.

"Hey, boys," he shouted, "look what's among us! Look at them there legs! Look at that hat."

Every head moved to Blinky. He was the object of a burst of merriment which made him flush slightly, yet he looked back at them steadily enough.

"I'm looking for the sheriff," he said.

A big man detached himself from a group who sat around a table playing cards.

"I'm the man," he said with a grin. "What you want, a bodyguard while you're travelin' in these here parts in them clothes?"

"I want the reward," said Blinky, feeling that he could stand this mirth since his own trumps were not yet touched, "for Sandy Donahue—dead or alive!"

A sudden silence fell on the room.

"For what?" asked the sheriff. "What do you want with Donahue? Have you met up with him?"

"I killed him," answered Blinky, fixing his pale eyes on the sheriff.

"You did *what?*" The sheriff pushed back his hat from his forehead and glared at Blinky as if he were suddenly robbed of understanding.

"This guy's tryin' a bum four-flush," said some one. "Where's his proof that he killed Sandy?"

"Outside. Look for yourself." He waved his hand toward the door.

There was no answer to this. Every man in the barroom started. There they wedged and had to fight their way out into the open.

The bartender alone remained in the room, and he was staring at the door with mouth ajar. Blinky stepped to the bar and made the unmistakable sign of thirst. The bartender served him, still with his head turned toward the door. Plainly his soul was not with his business at that moment.

As Blinky drained his glass a great shout rose from without and a chorus of shouts and curses. It was too much for the bartender. He broke for the door and disappeared. Blinky helped himself rapidly to another drink and then went to a chair, where he sat down.

He was yawning deliberately when the procession appeared.

First the sheriff backed through the door, and after him the entire crowd poured into the room. They stretched the body of Donahue on the card-table. Then the sheriff turned to Blinky.

"An' you did this?" he asked incredulously.

Blinky shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. He was beginning to feel that he could act up to his part.

"It ain't possible," broke in a voice. "Bah! That little runt ain't big enough to have looked twice at Sandy when he was livin'."

The heart of Blinky fell and his face paled, but his natural pallor was so great that this change of color was hardly noticeable. He saw very plainly that if he were to win reputation out of this he must play a high hand and play it at once. He rose slowly from the chair and approached the last speaker, whom he confronted with his hands resting lightly on his hips and his pallid stare turned up to the cowboy's face.

"Pardner," he said, thinking back to the dialect of Sandy and keeping his voice steady with a great effort, "it takes a lot more to prove a thing to a damn fool than it does to a wise man. Some people got to die to learn a thing."

His eyes went dizzy after this speech. He half expected that the larger man would draw a gun on him. But when his eyes cleared he saw that his bluff had carried. The big man had changed color. The dead body of the redoubtable Sandy was probably large in his eyes.

"I was merely askin' a question," he said. "There ain't no call to fly off the handle, is there?"

Blinky shrugged his shoulders. He felt as if a life-long weight had dropped from them.

"He's drilled clean," said the sheriff, who had conducted a hasty examination. "Right over the left breast. You must have got the drop on him—otherwise *you* wouldn't be here."

He turned sharply on Blinky as he made the observation.

"He had his gun out before I drew," said Blinky coldly.

The sheriff drew the Colt from Sandy's holster and glanced at it.

"Five shots," he said with a mighty wonder subduing his voice. "Five shots, an' you're still alive an' walkin'!" He turned to the crowd. "Boys, will somebody tell me if I dreamed this here?" He turned back to Blinky. "How many d'you fire?"

"I dunno," said Blinky carelessly—"'nuff!" He drew his gun and passed it to the sheriff, handle first.

The sheriff was greatly interested. "I seen a make like this down in a store window once," he avowed. "Look at this here toy gun, boys, that done for Sandy! Only three shots out of it."

The gun was passed cautiously from hand to hand amid exclamations.

"Three shots to five," muttered the sheriff, shaking his head. "I can't hardly believe it."

Again Blinky yawned.

"Look here!" cried a man. "Here's a roll of cash in Sandy's pocket."

The sheriff took the money with a puzzled frown and counted it.

"One hundred and eighty-four dollars," he announced and sighed. "You didn't even go through his pockets after you done the work?"

Blinky's response was an elaborate shrug. The men were regarding him with fascinated eyes as if he were some new species hardly to be placed in the category of men.

"That man belonged to the State," he announced pompously, "and what money he has belongs to the State, too. Am I wrong?"

The sheriff merely stared at him with wide eyes. The other men exchanged glances.

"How did you do it?" asked one of them. "Ain't you a new man in these parts?"

"I needed some easy money," said Blinky with a carefully careless inflection of his voice. "I come across this poster." He stopped to draw out the poster he had taken from the body of Sandy Donahue and tossed it on the bar. "So I went out to find Donahue," he said, "and found him."

"Where?"

Blinky waved his hand toward the north. "Up by a water hole. I was down on my knees getting a drink when Donahue comes up behind and tells me to stick up my hands."

"What happened then?" inquired the sheriff.

For answer Blinky waved to the dead body on the table.

"I put my hands up, but one of them carried a gun with it. It was a pretty thing while it lasted. Donahue was fast but wild."

"You must of been right on top of him when you fired," said a man who had been bent over the corpse. "Here's a powder burn."

"I was running in on him," said Blinky calmly. "Sorry I burned him, but I wasn't trying very hard to be polite just then."

A deep guffaw applauded this sally. The sheriff came up and seized Blinky's hand in a great paw.

"Son," he announced, "you're a bit different from the sort of men we see around here, all right, but I reckon you're about as regular a man as there is in these here parts. Any one who could stand up to Sandy Donahue and account for him, man to man, I take my hat off to. About this here reward. I'll see that you're fixed up right away."

"Thanks," said Blinky briefly. "It 'd come in handy. I'm a little short now."

"Old Binkersdorf offered five hundred besides what's comin' from the State," said the sheriff. "We can fix it up with the old man to pay you right away."

"I leave it to you," said Blinky, waving the subject into dismissal and turning toward the bartender. "I'm kind of fagged, been on the go after Donahue for two days. Think I'll hit the hay."

"Come this way," said the bartender, and led the new hero from the room.

Once he had disappeared the sheriff turned slowly toward the crowd. He still looked dazed as if he had just undergone some great shock.

"Boys," he said, "I've met up with a lot of queer people in my life, but never with a gun-fighter who looked like this pie-faced runt. This here man appears to have went on the trail of Sandy Donahue all by himself and killed him single-handed with a toy gun. I reckon I'm getting old. I'm goin' to apply for a room in the old man's home. Well, I'm goin' to see that Sandy gets buried decent. He was sure a hard fighter, but he was always a clean one."

CHAPTER VI.

MARKED CARDS.

SO began the sacking of El Dorado.

Ambition is like a plant in that it grows, but it grows far more rapidly than any plant, and never did ambition spring into flower in any man more suddenly than it grew into life in the heart of Blinky Meyers.

At first he looked upon El Dorado as

merely a place to leave as soon and as happily as possible. If his reward money had been paid to him on the first day he would certainly have disappeared toward the nearest railroad before the night fell. But there was a delay. Old Binkersdorf could not get his five hundred all together for a couple of days. He paid an instalment, and Blinky had to settle down to wait for the rest.

But before he was through waiting he had discovered that a new world lay at his feet ready to be conquered; and with the proper spirit of an Alexander, Blinky embraced the opportunity with both hands and a pack of marked cards. Moreover, there were tenderer motives which urged him to remain in El Dorado. The bulging pocketbooks of the cattlemen were hardly more attractive to Blinky than their adulation of him.

From the degradation of a hounded New York guttersnipe, starting at his own shadow and pallid for fear of the following law, he had suddenly become an awesome figure of fear to these Westerners. All his life he had found it hard to make himself current as a real man. Here he was accepted without question as a sort of a superman.

It was passing sweet to Blinky.

He came once on the verge of exposure. It was the evening of his second day that Lucky Pete, black-bearded and red-eyed from liquor, swaggered into the bar of the "Alsace Hotel," and in pressing up to the counter shouldered Blinky.

"Get out o' my way," shouted Pete. "Why the hell can't a man get a drink in this here joint?"

He seized Blinky by the shoulder and sent him whirling half-way across the room. Blinky's hand dropped into his open coat and settled firmly on the handle of his automatic. He knew that he could never draw that gun and still less use it, but he made the motion and stood with his pale eyes steady upon Pete's face, and in his heart two conflicting emotions, one a sudden distaste for El Dorado and the men of that Western town, and the other a tremendous impulse to flee through the nearest open door.

He was kept from action by the intervention of no less person than the sheriff. He leaped from behind and grappled Blinky by both arms.

"Don't shoot!" cried the sheriff, "he's drunk! He don't know what he's doing!"

Blinky permitted himself to be overcome after a short struggle. In the mean time others had thrown themselves upon Lucky Pete, and had wrested the gun from his hand.

"You fool!" whispered one of them to him, "are you pinin' for an early grave? That's the man what killed Sandy Donahue face to face!"

The effect of this news was astonishing. The face of Lucky Pete changed color.

"I might have known," he muttered. "He's got a bad eye—a damned bad eye!"

For Blinky stood observing him with the pallid and changeless stare.

"Let me go, boys," said Lucky Pete, "I'm sober now. Won't some of you gentlemen introduce me to Bad Eye over there?"

The sheriff rose to the crisis. He stepped between the two would-be combatants.

"Bad Eye, my friend," he said, taking up the name with which Lucky Pete had referred to Blinky, "you got to admit that Lucky Pete here was drunk, and you got to know that a drunk man ain't reasonable. Will you shake hands with him now?"

Lucky Pete advanced cautiously, one hand stretched toward the man-killer.

Blinky disregarded the question. His pale eyes were steady upon Pete. He turned and walked slowly from the room. At the door he paused.

"There's a big country around El Dorado, Lucky Pete," he said coldly, "and we ought to be able to find some place where we can meet without having the officers of the law"—here he bowed to the sheriff—"to introduce us."

With that he left the room.

That night Lucky Pete tin-canned out of El Dorado. The citizens of that city made no comment on the unannounced departure save to remark that Lucky Pete was a sensible man.

The other outcome of the adventure was that "Bad Eye" became the popular and

only name by which Blinky Meyers, late of the Bowery, was known throughout the environs of El Dorado.

But it was through cards that Blinky Meyers was to continue and establish his fame through the regions of El Dorado. His first exploit in this sphere of chance occurred in the back room of the Alsace bar. They were playing Black Jack, and Blinky was at his best in this game. He could deal with one hand, read the cards three deep while he was doing so, and bury any of the three cards in the middle or the bottom of the deck, dealing at the same time with equal facility from the top or the bottom, and all with the pale-eyed nonchalance which had made him notorious in New York, and which was to make him truly celebrated in El Dorado.

To say that Blinky made a " killing " on his first appearance in a Black Jack hand would be to put it mildly. He stacked the cards with a skill that would have deceived even Hoyle. He fed his opponents hands which worked them gradually to the breaking point.

He was not a large winner on this first evening through calculation. It was the grace with which he lost and the nonchalance with which he accepted his successes that won admiration. And two or three of the boys from whom he had made slight hauls were determined to get back at him on the succeeding nights.

They came back. But so did Blinky. He was astonished at the rope which he could pay out to these men. He was no less astonished at the size of their rolls. Night after night the bitten ones came back, curious to see how it was done and willing to pay to learn. So Blinky trimmed them with increasing rapidity. After the second day he abandoned his double and treble set-ups and would run up the pack only once. They were sure to bang into the crimp.

Then he made the discovery that they did not insist on fresh packs of cards for even the most important games. In fact they were as well content to play with a greasy and thumb-marked pack which, at one deal, became as familiar to the practised eyes of Blinky as they were to play with the whitest and stiffest card-boards ever flickered under a dealer's thumb. They were, in fact, so blind and so smiling in their losses that he sometimes felt that they were merely playing him along and were waiting to catch him red-handed before they rose, gun in hand, and shot him limb from limb.

But the days passed. The reward had been paid. The cattlemen were paying in still more. These were the fat days for Blinky, and he stored enough pelf away to keep him sustained through a long life of lean days.

He had long ago given up the New York clothes which had excited the mirth of the cattlemen. He took now to wide-brimmed hats and jacketlike coats of rough cloth, and bandannas around the throat, and a great wide belt above his hips to support the little automatic, very trim and insignificant in its dangling holster. And he got a pair of old-fashioned riding boots whose soft leather tops crumpled around his ankles and looked very natty indeed.

There was just enough of the Wild West about the outfit to make it seem in place. There was just enough Mexican dash in it to win the admiration of the cowboys. If fashions had been possible in El Dorado, he would have become the city's fashion-plate.

But as the sacking of El Dorado progressed, so grew the ambitions of Blinky Meyers. If he could plunder El Dorado, why should he not own it? It was a great moment in his life. The time came during the Saxon invasions of England when the invaders began to settle down in the country they had formerly robbed. So Blinky Meyers decided to settle down in El Dorado.

It might have seemed a hazardous and impossible undertaking to capture a modern American town. But in reality El Dorado was not particularly modern. It had one barbaric weakness which made it the easy prey of Blinky Meyers. There was not one of the worthy citizens who would not gamble for everything he possessed except his six-shooter and his silver spurs.

So Blinky, proceeding with caution and forethought, made his first step toward the

great conquest. He enticed "Stew" Young, ancient proprietor of the Alsace, into a game of stud-poker.

It would have seemed a brutal thing if he had sat down and deliberately won the hotel from Stew at one sitting, but Blinky staged his little game so cleverly that it seemed that the old man was the aggressor throughout. He won from him a little at a time on successive days, and each time he showed the greatest apparent disinclination to return to the play. But Stew had tasted blood and he wanted the finish. So he kept at the thing until the eventful evening came when Blinky stacked up two thousand dollars on the table and offered to bet it against the hotel.

It was a good deal more than the hotel was worth, but then Blinky was dealing and he could afford to be generous.

Stew bit off another chunk of tobacco and took the bet. There was a crowd of witnesses to attest the point. Blinky won. It was a close deal—but he won.

The old man pushed back in his chair and stared at the money for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders. He was a game loser. The boys came around and condoled with him. Then they would turn their eyes on Blinky with a question in them. Blinky wondered what that question could be.

The next morning Stew gathered his belongings into a battered trunk and hauled the trunk out to his still more battered buckboard, between the shafts of which stood a down-headed, iron-gray horse, far the most rickety of the three. Stew was on his way to become a camp cook in the open country. He had done that before he saved his pile and had bought the Alsace. He was far too old to save another pile.

There was quite a crowd gathered in front of the Alsace to watch Stew depart. They would come up one by one and examine his harness and then his horse and then shake hands with him, and then one by one they would turn to Blinky with that very singular question in their eyes. Blinky was very much puzzled.

Finally the sheriff drew him to one side.

"Are you sure goin' to let the old man go?" he asked Blinky gently.

"Sure I am," said Blinky, honestly irritated. "Didn't the old fool lose his bet? Think I want to keep him around as an ornament?"

The sheriff pushed back his hat and regarded Blinky with solemn astonishment.

"I got nothin' to say," he muttered—"not a word. I only thought—" He never completed his thought, but turned slowly away and called a good-by after the old man. Already rattling down the road in his buckboard, he turned in his seat and waving his big hat in the cheeriest of farewells.

So the last stage of the sack of El Dorado began.

Blinky was worried by that continual question which he had seen in the eyes of the men for the past twenty-four hours. He decided that they were simply a lower and stupider order of humanity and that he could never hope to understand them. He recalled how Sandy had refused to shoot the chipmunk, and also refused to be sunk in the pool, because he would poison the drinking water. Blinky made up his mind that these people possessed an element which would always be a mystery to him.

He was right.

But there is the old saying about the tide in the affairs of men. Blinky's had been at the flood for a long time. It was turning now. It was turning even as old Stew drove out of town, for at the same time that he drove out another man got off at the nearest railroad station, some twenty miles away.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN GREEK MEET GREEK.

THIS stranger was dressed in square and comfortable lines from the blunt crown of his soft hat to the flexible, square toes of his shoes. And he walked with a snappy, purposeful swing of the arms to the little store of the village.

If his appearance at first caused some amusement to the group of elders on the porch of the store and to the clerk within, he soon won their better opinion. For he was enormously alert and cheerful and he

had a way of looking you suddenly and directly in the eye so that you went straight inside and had to frown to look back at him.

A peculiarity about him was that with a cigar stowed in one side of his mouth he had a habit of whispering out of the other side, as if he were inviting you into a secret conference and imparting news of the greatest significance. And this for the most trivial matters of speech.

When he finished his long list of purchases in the town he appeared in a costume which was more or less in tune with the clothes of the men of the community. There was the inevitable bandanna, the heavy shoes, the wide sombrero, the sagging belt from which swung the typical long and heavy Colt in its holster. Further, he collected a shaken-down buggy and an old horse and started on his journey toward El Dorado.

He reached that metropolis late in the afternoon of the day, and after he had put up his horse in the shed behind the Alsace, he took a room in the hotel.

But in El Dorado the stranger at once began to attract more attention. For in spite of many physical differences the good people of El Dorado thought they noticed a great similarity between the newcomer and Bad Eye himself. For instance, there was the same habit of nodding the head backward when making a remark, and the same ability to twist words out of the side of the mouth, and to a certain extent the same vocabulary. Another point attracted their attention. He possessed the same peculiar pallor which Blinky had not yet lost.

It was a strange case. El Dorado wondered. They were eager to see these two men together. Perhaps they were friends. They asked the new man, who called himself John Smith. He declared that he had never heard of Bad Eye.

He was not much in evidence during that day, and when evening came on he loitered in the barroom for a while, though he drank little. They are apt to be suspicious in the West when a man will not step up for his drink when his turn comes, but Mr. Smith was so cheery about it and made so many remarks about the bad throat which forced him to lay off on the booze that they passed the affair over.

Moreover, he was excellent as a listener. He had heard none of the tales which were old in El Dorado for some weeks, and particularly he knew nothing of the spectacular appearance of Bad Eye, who had slain the famous Sandy Donahue. The details of that historic combat had been circulated and added to. Blinky had contributed a little in friendly moments. His little had been magnified by gossip which he did not care to contradict. So that now the town possessed the makings of an epic whose every detail was capable of being visualized.

To all of this Mr. Smith listened attentively. In fact he appeared to sympathize with the exploits of Mr. Bad Eye as deeply as if he had been his blood-brother. By degrees the crowd was slipping from the barroom into the back room which had now been converted by Blinky Meyers into an ideal card-room, with little round tables and excellent lights—lights which were peculiarly necessary to Blinky, for even the most practised eye needs a good light when reading marked cards.

The exodus at last became so marked that the stranger said good night to the bartender and joined the others within the card-room. There was a great deal of action there, but most of it was centered around the table where Blinky himself sat. He was playing his favorite Black Jack, and the money was changing hands rapidly.

To-night Blinky was feeling peculiarly exuberant. The possession of the hotel swelled him with a most natural pride. He had made great the day by partaking of a still more favorite brandy—in ponies, to be sure, but even these count up in quantity before the end of a long day of celebration.

So Blinky drank until he was happy and then until he was exuberant. There he stayed. He rarely passed beyond that point. It was his natural limit.

Moreover, his partners had pleased him this evening. They had money. They had stomachs. The latter were partial to whisky. The former they were willing to spend. Blinky showed them how to spend it most rapidly.

And around his table, watching the proverbial "luck" of Bad Eye, the pride of El Dorado stood grouped. Here it was that the cheerful Mr. Smith came and took his stand. When Al Dangberg, broke, stood up and turned his emptied pockets inside out, Mr. Smith very naturally slipped into the vacant chair, though it seemed a rash act on the part of one who had witnessed the amazing luck which was blessing Bad Eye on this evening.

Half a dozen deals had passed and still Bad Eye held the deal. It seemed as if no one else at the board could hold an ace and a face card. He never held less than twenty. And the crowd took it all good-humoredly enough. They were accustomed to see all things fall to the will of Bad Eye.

But after these half-dozen deals Mr. Smith, who had been quietly interested in the backs of these cards all this time, and particularly in the corners of these backs, though to a casual observer he had not studied them a moment, suggested to his neighbor that the cards they were playing with were rather old, and that it might be well if they got a fresh pack.

The neighbor received the suggestion with enthusiasm. He beat upon the table and announced his desire. Bad Eye, looking up while he shuffled the cards, smiled and consented. In so doing he glanced for the first time at the strange Mr. Smith.

At that moment, perhaps by chance, the flap of Mr. Smith's coat fell open, and Blinky, looking straight at him across the table, could not fail to note a significant little bulge under Mr. Smith's armpit.

Blinky knew just what that bulge was. He had a similar one under his own arm. Nothing save a small automatic had just such an outline. Through Blinky's mind flashed a thousand suspicions. He knew now that he was playing against a man of his own training and caliber. Or perhaps a bigger caliber than his. He noted now the stranger's pallor and his tricks of speech. Beyond a doubt he was now face to face with metal worthy of his sword.

It would have seemed for the instant that Blinky had turned a little paler than usual, but as he leaned back in his chair, waiting for the fresh pack, his eyes met those of the stranger again, and as Mr. Smith seemed not in the slightest degree interested, Blinky shrugged his shoulders and seemed at the same to shake some weighty question from his mind.

When the fresh pack arrived the game was renewed with ardor. Blinky still won, though with less rapidity than before; still his gains were remarkable during his own deals. It was also worthy of interest that Mr. Smith bet only nominal sums while Blinky dealt, but renewed his interest when the deal changed. It was further of interest to note his slender white hands which flew over the pack when he dealt with a suggestion of fondness in their light touches.

And he, too, won with surprising regularity during his deals.

So the game waxed old and the night waxed old with it. A good many had left the room, and finally the last man at the table withdrew and left the possession of the board to Blinky and the stranger alone. The stranger took the deal and shuffled the cards rapidly. As Blinky's hand settled over the pack to cut, he started, as though some one had moved his chair, and he glanced up with a quick frown at the stranger. He had felt a noticeable crimp in the deck.

Blinky was fascinated. He noticed now, too, that the stranger was dealing in his own pet fashion with one hand flicking the cards over the table with the skill of long practise. A little chill began to touch Blinky's spine.

His first impulse was to call the game to an end. His second was irritation. His third was to call for a drink. He obeyed the third impulse. So it happened that the pile of coin and bills before the stranger grew and grew, and Blinky drank and drank.

He began to bet recklessly now on his own deal, forgetting that his fingers were losing a good deal of their usual skill, and the stranger began to take chances on Blinky's own deals, and won amazingly. The bystanders were breathless.

"Seems as how," said one big cattleman, "this here fellow has come from Bad Eye's own home town and has a bit more of Bad Eye luck!"

It was the general sentiment.

"I'm through!" cried Blinky at last. "I've been playing too long to-day."

There was a moment of dead silence around the table. It seemed the height of bad sportsmanship. It was the second black eye for their gun-fighter that day. The first had been the departure of old Stew.

"A few more hands," said the strange Mr. Smith, "I got a story that 'll interest and maybe make you want to play some more."

"One more hand," said Blinky, noting that the sentiment of his crowd was turning against him and anxious to make a graceful exit from this losing game.

"The story," said Mr. Smith, "isn't much to tell a gun-fighter like yourself. But it happened to a friend of mine. He was a detective in New York."

Blinky looked up with a very real interest.

"Are you from New York?" he asked.

"Sure."

It became necessary for Blinky to loosen his collar. "Go on!" he said.

"This here detective friend of mine," said Mr. Smith amiably, "was working with a bunch of the force who were raiding a gambling joint. One of the gamblers got away and ran down the stairs my friend was guarding. He jumped the gambler and started searching him when the gambler jumped away down the stairs and shot my friend when he started to follow. It wasn't a severe wound, just a graze, but it was enough to stop him from following. Then the chief of detectives got wind of it, and how his detective, this friend of mine, had let the crook get away, and he docked the detective. So my friend he lay in the hospital sick for a while. You see, he was a married guy. He needed his job pretty bad. And he hated to lose it because of a damned crook. And when he got out of the hospital he got a clue as to where the crook had run, which was a long way from New York. Then he started out after him with just enough money to buy his grub on the way. Had to beat it on freight-cars—but, say, I guess you aren't very interested in my story."

Blinky had an unmistakably sick color.

"Not very much," he murmured.

"Well," said Mr. Smith, "anyways, let's play a few more hands."

"Anything you say," submitted Blinky, almost humbly.

And thereafter a prodigy occurred, for Blinky lost with amazing regularity. It was almost as if he had lost interest in the game and in life itself. He played his cards mechanically. Mr. Smith accumulated a vast pile of money.

At last Blinky rose, somewhat shaky on his feet and his eyes depressed.

"I'm broke," he said; "I haven't another cent."

Mr. Smith eyed him critically. Evidently Blinky was broke in more than a money way.

"Lay you the whole pile for the hotel here," he suggested.

The crowd closed round them silently in their fascination.

Blinky waved a hand in submission and slumped into his chair again.

And when the deal was past he sat staring at a nineteen-hand, while the stranger showed an even twenty.

Suddenly Blinky started up fiercely.

"Damn you!" he said, you're a crook. You can't get away with this—not in El Dorado!"

A flash of steel showed in his hand. There was sudden motion through the room. Every man who could reach the bar dived behind it like fish into water. Those who were too far away sprawled flat on the floor. There was a moment of silence and then a laugh sounded, a calm and clear laugh instead of a pistol shot. It was the strange Mr. Smith who laughed.

And he rose where he was and said, still laughing: "What a rotten little cur you are, Blinky; what a yellow deuce."

The crowd shrank closer to the floor. The shot would surely come now. Instead, they heard the voice of the stranger again saying opprobrious things to their hero.

"Why, you hound," said Mr. Smith evenly, "did you think I'd be broke and stand for it? Did you think the earth was wide enough to hide you from me? Not a hope. Not a hope, my boy Here I am. Now, take water. Don't point that gun at

me. You had the guts to shoot on a back stairs. You haven't the heart to fire before a man. Have you?"

Here some of those on the floor slowly raised their heads far enough to look and wonder, for the strange Mr. Smith was standing leaning across the table, and not an inch from his nose was the gun of Bad Eye. But the gun was wabbling, and Mr. Smith smiled. Then his hand went up very slowly, so that a child could have seen it, and took the gun from Bad Eye's hand.

"Get out!" said Mr. Smith.

The crowd rose as one man to their feet, still too paralyzed with horrified astonishment to move further.

"Get out!" repeated Mr. Smith. "Beat it back to where you belong. If I had a warrant I'd be company for you. Get!"

And the terrible Bad Eye turned and moved toward the door.

He had almost reached the entrance. He had opened the door upon the night. Then Mr. Smith took a light step forward, poising himself upon his left foot, and swung his right so that the stout, square toe landed with an audible precision. As the result of this action Bad Eye sagged in the middle and pitched forward through the door.

A clamor began and rose suddenly through the room. "Get him!" "Let's see what sort of a guy Bad Eye is!" "We've all been bluffed!" "He never plugged Sandy!"

They were starting toward the door with danger in their eyes when Mr. Smith interposed with raised hand.

"Fellers," said Mr. Smith, "don't chase after him. He ain't worth your attention. I wouldn't have hurt my toes kicking him just now except that he had me a little peeved. Boys, I happen to own this hotel just now. Suppose we all line up and have a drink—on the house."

Some applause greeted this popular suggestion, and when they stood with glasses lifted Mr. Smith spoke again:

"Fellers," he said, "I got to say that I come a long way to get back at that dirty little guttersnipe I just kicked through the door. He plugged me in New York while I was makin' an arrest. I was in a hospital a while. Then I come after him. Well, I got more than his skin. I got his whole goat—am I wrong?—and several thousand dollars and this hotel. For this hotel, I don't want it. I wouldn't keep it as a gift, which it was. It goes back to the old chap who owned it before. As for Bad Eye, let me tip you off, his name in Monkey Hill is Meyers—Blinky Meyers—because he never had the guts to look a real man square. He's bluffed you boys. He never did for Sandy Donahue. If Sandy was killed, he killed himself. Get me?"

"By God!" shouted a voice, "I always *did* have a hunch that that was what happened! Remember that powder burn? I'll bet he was foolin' with Bad Eye's gun and got plugged himself."

"Hey!" called another. "I always wanted to punch that pasty face of Bad Eye's when he was winning from me. Now, why the devil didn't I?"

Mr. Smith smiled behind his hand.

"Well, boys," he said, "here's a toast to a real man, whatever else he may have been. We're drinking to Sandy Donahue!"

And about this time, mounted on a fast-running horse, Blinky plunged from the outskirts of El Dorado into the wide night of the plains to be seen no more—at least in this story.

(The end.)

OLD AGE

BY LORNA W. INGALLS

OLD AGE is creeping on me unawares;
I hear his tired footsteps on the stairs.
Old Age, I do not want you. Go away!
Another time you must return and stay,

Bohemia, Good-Bye!

by Charles Belmont Davis

THE awakening had come to David Preston at the comparatively early age of thirty. For a space of five years or so he had been floating on the tides of Park Row and Broadway—just drifting—reporter, copy-reader, assistant dramatic critic, theatrical press-agent. And then one day came the opportunity that seems to come at least once to all young men, and, opportunity masquerading as a particularly heavy breaker, had dashed Preston on the hard sands and awakened him to a sudden understanding of the uselessness of his present futile life.

David Preston realized that it was entirely up to him and high time to decide whether he was going to continue a city beachcomber or climb the heights.

Therefore, clad in a soiled bath-wrapper, surrounded by the tinsel decoration of the bedroom of a cheap Broadway hotel, David took stock of his mental assets—of material assets he had almost none. In all of the positions he had held he had been a slacker, and in only one of them, the press-agent one, had he shown any natural ability or imagination. Therefore, the opportunity having arrived he quickly decided that he would become a superlative press-agent, or what is known in big business as a director of publicity.

From observation, David knew that requirements for the transition were almost negligible and demanded only the change from careless to careful dressing and the consorting with captains of industry instead of flashy theatrical managers and the glittering ornaments, male and female, of the Broadway stage. It was his belief—and his future proved its truth—that the love of publicity was just as dear to the heart of the captain of industry and the wife of the captain of industry as it was to that of any man or woman star — stage or screen— whose name, writ large in electric bulbs, ever helped to illumine the Great White Way.

At the moment, Preston happened to be employed as the press-agent for a musical comedy playing at a Broadway theater, and before taking the plunge he decided to have just one more supper with the present lady of his love.

The event would mark the breaking of the last tie.

The young lady was a pretty member of the chorus of the company whose publicity he controlled. Indeed, the young woman, Claire Marquard, was not only extremely comely, but was admitted to be a "chic dresser," possessed of an unusual degree of intelligence, and was known for her high standard of morals.

The trysting place for Preston's farewell to Broadway was a small table in a shadowy corner of a restaurant where, for the past few months, Miss Marquard and he had met many, many times. But there was

something so evidently different in the manner of Preston that Claire was conscious of the change even before she had taken her accustomed seat across the little table. For a moment, in the dim light of the pink-shaded lamp, with folded hands, she sat looking curiously at the tense, elated features of her host, features usually so calm and smiling.

"What's wrong, Davy?" she asked. "Why so sad? If it's money, don't forget to-night was pay night, and I got my whole thirty."

"I'm not sad," David laughed, "I'm serious. After five years, I've waked up. Do you remember that Bohemia lyric from 'Algeria'? You probably don't as you never seem to know the lyrics of your own show. Well, it ran something like this:

"Bohemia, good-by! Bohemia, good-by!
Farewell to the land of the midnight sun,
Where the rosy rivers of the red ink run;
Bohemia, good-by! Your pleasures I must ban.
I love your pace, but you're no place
For a regular married man."

Even in the dim light the startled look that had come into the usually smiling features of Miss Marquard was very evident to her companion, and as he finished the last line of the lyric David heard a half-stifled sigh.

"You mean, Davy, you're going to get married?" she asked.

David chuckled nervously and shook his head.

"Not a bit like it—that is, except I'm to be wedded to my art. But I'm going to stop this wallowing. I'm done with Broadway. There's a roller-top waiting for me in a little office in a high building on Wall Street. I've been offered the job of making corporations and officials appear eminently respectable; that is, appear respectable in the eyes of the people who read newspapers, and while I'm on the job I've got to appear respectable myself. I'm going to wear well-pressed clothes and an ingratiating and unctuous smile. The opening, I admit, is a small one, but I'm going to jump into it or through it or whatever you do to openings in big business."

David had spoken with boyish enthusiasm, almost bruskness. Claire shifted her dull eyes from the pink lamp-shade to Preston, raised an empty glass from the table half-way to her lips, and, still unconscious that it was empty, put it down again.

"And—and Claire," she asked. "I suppose you're going to scrap her with the rest of your Broadway past, yes?"

David frowned and the frown gave way to the smile, the smile of which Claire had of late grown very fond, and putting his hand out met that of the girl half-way across the table.

"Why, no, Claire," he said, "of course not. But you're the only part of my Broadway past I'm not going to scrap. We'll have to give up these little suppers, and I don't suppose I can see as much of you as I have of late."

Preston drew his lips into a hard, straight line and shook his head with visible impatience at the girl's lack of understanding. The new life David had planned for himself had thrilled him, and before he had met Claire that evening he had promised his new self to be severe, even cruelly hard if it were necessary. He had thoroughly steeled himself against any turning back. Hereafter the lights of Broadway must not be dimmed but turned off completely. "Bohemia, good-by!"

For several minutes, at least to David it seemed that long, there was silence between them. It was Claire who spoke first.

"I think it's fine, Davy," she said; "fine, even if I do lose out. I'm afraid I don't know much about big business, except through the younger sons whom I meet at supper parties. They never struck me as a very clever lot—I suppose they don't have to be clever—they were born with theirs ready-made. It oughtn't to be a hard game for you, Davy, with your good looks and your pleasant ways. And they all seem to think you're a genius as a press agent—when you work at it."

"Thank you," said David.

"Perhaps, when you're rich and famous," the girl ran on, "you'll come back to Broadway and give wine suppers to the girls like the other millionaires."

"You mean I might return as a Johnnie?" David said.

"Who knows," Claire sighed, "but it

wouldn't be much fun. The girls who have loved you loved you—well, because you're you. They love Johnnies for very different reasons."

"Would I notice the difference?" David asked.

Claire slowly nodded her pretty head. "You sure would," she said. "The kind of love girls gave you, you can't buy with champagne or even diamonds and pearls."

"What do you say to a bottle of champagne now?" David urged; "it may be our last supper for a long time."

Perhaps it was due to the unusual offer or perhaps it was because Preston had recalled the fact that this was to be their last supper for a long time, but, from one cause or another, the blood crept slowly into Claire's face and, for a moment, she pressed the palm of her hand against her eyes.

"No, thank you, Davy," she said. "All the champagne in the world can't make a girl care for a man any more—that is, when she really cares. That wine stuff is all right from a Johnnie, but it doesn't come very well from a press-agent; and don't forget, Davy, that for to-night you're still a press-agent."

The supper-party from hardly any standpoint could be considered a success, and at a very early hour it broke up. Claire lived at a boarding-house in the Fifties, and thither, almost in silence, the two friends took their last walk together. It was one of those old-fashioned New York brown-stone fronts with high steps and a spacious vestibule. The night was dark, and there was but a single gas-jet burning dimly in the hallway.

"Well, good-by, Claire," said Preston.

Claire did not trust herself to speak, but putting her arms about David's neck, drew him closely to her and pressed her warm, young lips to his. It was their first kiss. He left her groping in her hand-bag for the key to the inner door. Once more in the street, he lighted a cigar and, with a free, elastic step, swung on his way toward his hotel. The cords that bound him to the old life had been cut, and, throwing out his chest, he filled his lungs full of the clean, fresh air of his new-found freedom. Already he chafed at the long delay of the night that must intervene before the dawn of the morrow.

However successful the new work of David Preston may have been, it was of necessity anonymous work and, therefore, the ex-theatrical press-agent passed completely from the knowledge of his former friends as he did from the old-time haunts. As a matter of fact, in a few years he had met with a very great success. Even if compelled to remain unknown to fame, he had acquired a large and sure income and was recognized by the circle of wealthy men by whom he wanted to be recognized as a publicity man of unusual imagination and discretion. When a corporation wanted to right itself in the eyes of the public, it sought the high-priced advice and services of Preston.

The individual man in public life whom the world had chosen to regard as a sinner turned to Preston, and the latter's talented whitewash brush promptly transformed the sinner to a saint and an admirable citizen. No longer did the young superman of publicity deal with arrogant and suspicious city editors; now he found easy access to the sanctums of the proprietors of powerful newspapers—men who in turn for high-class publicity demanded only an inside knowledge of the stock-market or social preferment for their wife or daughter.

With a wave of his well-cared-for hand, Preston could turn black to white, and with his magic wand—for a large emolument—could almost overnight gild a sadly tarnished and besmirched reputation. Among other publicity men he was recognized in a business way as a "wizard" and outside of business he was known as a young man of unblemished reputation.

He lived in a handsomely furnished apartment in a modish neighborhood on the East Side of the park, where, to a few acquaintances, he occasionally gave well-appointed entertainments. On Sundays he attended morning service at a fashionable Fifth Avenue church, and after church joined the parade, and, with quite a Chesterfieldian manner, doffed his silk hat to such of his rich clients who chose to recognize him. Occasionally he visited the theater, usually alone, and always occupied

a seat well to the rear of the auditorium and far beyond the recognition of his former friends on the other side of the footlights. It was rather a lonely, circumscribed sort of life, few acquaintances, no friends; but his house was in order, and he was making a great deal of money.

When the war broke out his success advanced in leaps and bounds. The munition-makers, the men who made contracts for enormous sums were in great need of publicity or the suppression of it, and Preston was a past master at both. He was very busy in New York, and he did much traveling as his clients were broadly scattered. One day while on his way to Chicago he glanced at the head-lines of a newspaper and saw the names of Herbert Brownlow, a prominent young millionaire and Claire Marquard. On reading the article it seemed that Brownlow had become engaged to the former chorus girl. But Preston was glad to read that as soon as the engagement had been announced the young man's people, who were prominent socially in New York, had at once recognized the bride-to-be, and with apparent enthusiasm had received her into the family circle. Preston read the article several times and decided to telegraph Claire from Chicago, sending her his good wishes. However, on giving the subject further thought, he decided that even if Claire remembered him she would probably prefer not to be reminded of the old days. Besides, since that night when he had said good-by to her in the vestibule of the Fifty-Eighth Street boarding-house he had never communicated with her in any way. As an actress, Claire had made a sure and steady progress. In no way could her success be compared to that of Preston's, but in the musical comedy world she had gained a position of enviable distinction. But now she was to become the wife of a man who was not only very rich, but who had a social position which David could never hope to have, and he felt that he could ill afford to recall himself to her. If he did she would probably snub or ignore him, either of which fates David knew was his due.

When the United States entered the war Preston promptly obtained an official position in Washington, where he could do a certain amount of war-work and at the same time keep in touch with his clients, most of whom had entered the service of the government as "dollar men." One morning, a few months after he had gone to Washington, he received a letter addressed in a woman's handwriting which seemed familiar, but he could not recall the author. On opening the letter he found it was from Claire. It read:

DEAR DAVID:

I wish something done in a business way which, I understand, you can do better than any one else. The next time you are in New York, which I trust will be soon, please come to see me. If you will undertake the commission, I think I can promise to make it worth your while.

Sincerely yours,
CLAIRE MARQUARD.

The same night David started for New York, and the following morning telephoned Claire and made an appointment to call on her in the late afternoon. When he was shown into the living-room he found her sitting on a lounge near the hearth. The room was quite dark, but the red glow from the crackling logs fell on Claire and the silver tea things placed on a small table before her.

"It was very good of you to come," she said. David took the hand she proffered him and bent low over it.

"It was a great privilege to be allowed to serve you," he answered. "You see I lost no time in obeying your summons."

For a moment he stood looking down at her. The face was just as pretty and fresh-looking as it used to be, but now the soft brown hair was worn in two rolls far down over the broad white forehead, and the change seemed to accentuate the refinement of the well-cut features. And it was evident to David that something had been added to the way in which the girl held her head, and indeed to her whole manner, which gave an air of great poise and distinction.

Claire smiled at David's critical glance, and in turn allowed her eyes to wander slowly from his carefully brushed hair to his immaculate cloth-top boots.

"And so you did get the well-pressed clothes," she laughed; "and, believe me,

you look just as respectable as you said you wanted to look. David, they tell me you are a great success—rich and famous. Forgive me if I have my little joke, but we're quite alone. I told the maid not to let any one in. Our business is very confidential, must be; that's why I sent for you. I hear you are the acme of all that is discreet."

"You're very kind," David said, and dropped into a deep chair facing the tea-table and his hostess. "Discretion and a complete forgetfulness of my client's wishes—that is, after the job is done—are my chief assets."

David tok the cup of tea that she offered him and smiled into the smiling eyes of Claire. Then, for a brief moment, he glanced about the shadowy room, at the pretty hangings, the old mahogany furniture, the softly colored rugs on the gleaming floor.

"What is your particular wish?" he asked. "To judge by this room it would seem that you have everything in reason."

"It *is* a pretty room," Claire laughed. "So I have — everything — everything in reason. But there are some things that are supposed to be beyond reason, even beyond price. You ought to know, for I've understood that buying things beyond reason and beyond price was your specialty."

David put down his cup, folded his arms and resting his elbows on his knees, gazed at the burning logs. "I'm afraid my specialty has been the gentle art of whitewashing, covering vice with a coat of virtue. I don't see exactly how I can help you, because you were always virtuous, and I knew you in the days and under conditions when any girl must frequently wonder if virtue really pays. Do you remember how the girls in the company used to call you 'good Claire'?"

Claire nodded and smiled at the mention of the old nickname.

"But the trouble is, David," she said, "my reputation for virtue is only local. I want it to be international. I'm tired of sharing paragraphs as one of a list of a dozen members of some charity board. You see, I'm great on charity now that I've given up the stage. I want a paragraph of a column all to myself. I want a picture of myself printed alone, not as one of a group. I want to go to France and start something—a canteen, or a hospital, or an officers' club, and I want all the publicity you can get for me, and eventually I want a decoration from the French government. Is that a very large order?"

"Is your fiancé willing?" David asked.

"Oh, Herbert's willing enough," Claire said. "He's working himself to death in Washington waiting for peace and the time to marry poor little me. You know he's a dollar a year man, but he'll stand for anything in reason."

For a few minutes there was silence between them, and then David said: "Speaking entirely as an old friend rather than as your possible publicity-agent, may I be so impertinent as to ask why you really want to do this?"

Claire smiled at David's question and settled her lithe, pretty figure further back into the depths of the big lounge.

"Oh, that's all right," she said. "It's just a whim. And why do I have whims? Perhaps the thought of so much perspective wealth rather staggers me. Why does any fish out of water squirm and flop about from one bit of dry sand to another?"

"I never had a very large acquaintance with fish," David laughed, "but I suppose that the fish thinks every new squirm or flop may bring it a little nearer the water or at least where breathing is easier."

"I suppose so," Claire said. "What do you say, David, will you undertake to win a war decoration for me."

For a few minutes David was silent and sat gazing at the burning logs. Then apparently shaking himself free from his reverie, he got up and stood with his back to the fire-place.

"If half an hour ago," he said, "or, indeed, any time during the last two years, you had suggested that I would or could consider refusing you any request that I could so easily grant I should have thought you quite mad—quite."

"Then why refuse?" Claire asked.

"That's an easy one," David laughed. "Because I've never done publicity for any one I didn't learn to hate, and I don't want to learn to hate you."

Preston was staring at the portières across the room and speaking in a voice wholly impersonal, as if what he was saying had nothing at all to do with the girl on the lounge.

"But publicity," Claire argued, "is your very life."

"It may be my very life," David said, "but it's not all of it. When I knew you I only played at publicity, and very soon it will play no part in my life at all. It belongs to the years between—for me very unhappy years."

"I remember the old days," Claire said, "but how about the new ones—I mean after the years between are over?"

Preston smiled cheerfully and then went on talking again in the same impersonal way. "You'd never guess, Claire. A year ago I bought a fifty-acre farm. It's down on the James River, and I restored the old mansion and fixed the place up generally. The lawn runs down to the water's edge, and I have a pier and a rowboat and a dinky little launch. When I get tired of sitting on my porch I go fishing in my little launch. In the back there is a stable with two old farm horses who do nothing but eat their old heads off, and in the house itself there is a library that has hundreds of books in it, and every one of them tells you all about somebody who died a long, long time ago, and who had a book written about him because he did something worth while, and not because he had a press-agent. There is a mail once a day, if I choose to go after it, and I never subscribe to a newspaper. It is the most lovely home and the most lonely place I ever saw. The home and everything in it came to me through publicity, but the place is just as private as if the orchard that surrounds the house were overrun with boa constrictors, and as if the house itself were a hospital for lepers with a hundred beds and the beds were always filled. When I give up publicity I'm going down there to live out my days in peace and contentment, and I hope that time is to be very soon."

Claire slightly shrugged her shoulders, and, as if to bring the interview to an end, rose from the lounge. "Then you refuse," she said, "to find me all the publicity I want and a French decoration? I'm willing to pay a good fee."

"Not at all," David protested. "I'm only sorry you want them. I couldn't refuse you anything. The fee will be my gratitude."

"Gratitude!" Claire asked. "Gratitude for what?"

David looked straight into the lovely face with the smiling, curious eyes.

"For a kiss you once gave me," he said, "several years ago. It was in the vestibule of your boarding-house—my farewell to Bohemia. It was the night I said good-by to freedom and just before I took the plunge into big business and respectability. The old place is still a boarding-house. I often go back there and sneak up the steps, and I'm always afraid some one's going to mistake me for a burglar."

"Why do you go back?" Claire asked. "It seems so far from your present life."

David was still before the hearth, his hands deep in his trouser-pockets, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Why?" he repeated. "Oh, just to dream dreams about what I would do if I had my life to live over again. It never fails to give me a thrill, and there are so few thrills in my present life. It's a nice, cozy old vestibule—not a bit changed since that night you and—"

"Oh, yes it is," Claire interrupted. "Why, David, have you forgotten the old mat that was chained with a huge cable that we were always tripping over. Well, some one must have stolen it, because only last week, when I was there, the mat was gone and there was a piece of dirty carpet in its place. And isn't it funny, David, that you should feel that when you are standing there some one is going to mistake you for a burglar, because that's just the way I always feel."

David suddenly turned his eyes from the ceiling to the eyes of the girl who now was standing very close to him.

"That's right," David said, "there is a dirty piece of carpet there now. But what difference does a dirty piece of carpet or a chained mat make in your life. Why should you ever go back there? Tell me that, Claire—why?"

"Why shouldn't I go back there," she said. "Must men dream all the dreams and enjoy all the thrills in this life? Do you suppose, David, it is only the men who suffer from the days between?"

They were standing very close to each other now and almost unconsciously, and just as if they had always been lovers—just as if publicity had not for those unhappy years kept them apart—David put out his arms and she snuggled into them with a contented little sigh.

"Do you think," she asked, "that the dinky little launch is big enough for two?"

"Quite," said David, and he tried to kiss the lips so close to his own.

But Claire drew her face away and gently pushed him from her. "Not yet, David," she said. "Wait just a moment until I get my hat and coat. Then we can walk around to the vestibule on Fifty-Eighth Street and stand on the dirty piece of carpet and—I've waited a long time for that kiss, David; a long time."

THE WOOD WAY

BY HARRIET WHITNEY SYMONDS

WHO will may hug the comfort
Of fagot flames aleap,
With idle pipe invoking
The drowsy god of sleep;
I take the tangled wood way
Where crimson maples flare,
When winds are cuddled down at rest,
And frost is in the air.

Stout wardens of the woodland,
Uprise the burly oaks;
The silver birches shimmer
Like maids in satin cloaks;
With staff and wand and scepter,
With finger slim and straight,
They point along the magic road
To Linda's garden gate.

I catch the frighted rustle
Of furry forest things,
And, up from sunny opens,
The whir of speckled wings;
I riot in the flavors
That steam from fen and fell,
When autumn's flagons overdrip
With mead and hydromel.

I dally in the forest
Because the way is sweet,
While yet my quest is potent
To wing a lover's feet;
For, all the while I loiter,
I dream of joys that wait
Where ends the wood way's frosty trail
At Linda's garden gate!

Where Dead Men Walk

by Henry Leverage

Author of "Whispering Wires," "Micky McMasters," "The White Cipher," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

VILOS HOLBROOK, a man of small but independent means, returned to his flat from the Three Students' Ball to find his guardian, Colonel Bishop, lost in a drunken stupor in the guest-chamber.

At the ball his club friend, Major Garrick, had introduced him to a dancer, "Gipsy Cragen," who was attended by her father and one Mike Dugan. Vilos felt a strong attraction for the girl, but an equally pronounced distaste for her father and Dugan, whom the major assured him was a big political boss and grafter. Cragen was a tool of Dugan, but resented the latter's attentions to his daughter.

But Vilos's emotions were swept aside by his guardian's confession that he had been swindled out of his own and his ward's fortune by a gang of crooks, who sold him a big block of worthless stock. He had been taken in by a Robert Bowditch, who introduced him to a dying engineer, attended by an only daughter from whom he purchased the worthless paper.

After an interview with Gipsy, Vilos felt sure the girl, who told him he could not see her again, was concerned in the deal. Then the colonel, who caught a passing glimpse of her face, declared she was the daughter of the man who had swindled them. At the club he found Major Garrick with a gentleman whom he introduced as "Mr. Hickson." Vilos now felt he was on the track of the ingratiating Robert Bowditch and the sick engineer.. When the colonel turned up within an hour to identify Garrick, the major had left for Asia.

Vilos now began to frequent the cheaper cafés and restaurants. In one of these he found Cragen and Mike Dugan. He followed the former to his home, and later found Gipsy at the saloon, where she had gone on her father's errand.

Gipsy confessed her part in the engineer's swindle, and under promise from Vilos that he would do nothing, took him home to see her father, who was even then closeted with Mr. Hickson.

Cragen and Hickson declared they were ready to pull a deal in pink pearls, and Gipsy offered to take Vilos on as a pupil.

Vilos felt the Gipsy's urging glance. "I might take a chance," he said.

CHAPTER VII.

"OCCASIONAL OFFENDERS."

THE week that followed Vilos's visit to Flannagan's Flats was filled with a blurred kaleidoscope of shifting forms, furtive glances and a growing conviction that an operation of the first magnitude was being planned by Cragen, Hickson, and the elusive major.

Of the major, Vilos had seen nothing. He had phoned once or twice and had been answered by the Gipsy or her father. The sight of the nickel-plated telephone in the cheap tenement was incongruous. Cragen's name was not in the book. He had what was known as a private number about which telephone-central would give no information.

Vilos went to the tenement at least once each day. Cragen sounded him thoroughly in regard to crime and conscience. The old thief was a master of direct questioning. It was evident to Vilos that a new man

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would be welcome with the gang, for the reason that some of the old tools had either lost their nerve or were spending their hours pulling brushes, or making little rocks out of big ones, in a certain stone-girded resort on the river.

Many men came to Flannagan's Flats for a talk with Cragen. Among them were detectives. This fact struck Vilos as all out of proportion. He saw Sweeney dodge out of the entrance one evening. The fence in the basement, whose windows were filled with globe-valves and brass and rubber, went under the name of Old Vic. He was an ex-police captain.

Old Vic was at least seventy years of age. He resembled a bag of his own swag. He talked in whispers with Cragen and oftentimes mentioned the glorious time of Sheeny Mike, and Mother Mandelbaum, and Jimmy Hope.

Vilos found that there was an atmosphere in the underworld which he had never suspected.

Old Vic was overly fond of relating the story of Mother Mandelbaum and her pretty daughter. Mother Mandelbaum had flourished in the early days as a first-class fence. She kept the secret of her life from her daughter, whom she educated with an English tutor and a French governess.

Then there was Sheeny Mike. He had passed with increased police activity. Also had passed the time when Paper Collar Joe and Hungry Joe and Danny Nugent had sold such edifices as the City Hall and the City Hall Park

The new mobs worked with more handicaps. They were furtive children of crime who had no real organization. The Gipsy introduced Vilos to at least a score of the leading lights in the underworld.

He met them under their aliases.

" Foley, the Goat, a pickpocket; Spilly, a pennyweighter, which is argot for shoplifting; Chi May and Miggles and the Dropper; Beansie Burns and Billy the Kid; Little Dick Harris, a first-class bank sneak; Frisco Slim; Boston Charlie; Spikot, a gunman; Baby Ellen, a stout, wire-tapper; Glycerin Jimmy, a heavy-man from the West, who always carried ' white-money ' and ' stickers ' in his pockets; Mike the Bike, a second-story man, and Fainting Bertha."

There were two more of the underworld whose names were mentioned by Cragen or the Gipsy.

These two went under the sobriquets of the Sultan and Minnie May, the Duchess. Vilos learned that the Sultan was none other than Major Garrick, who played many parts. His consort was rated very high by the elect. Minnie May had a police record from San Diego to far-off Cairo.

The metaphors and argot used by Cragen, whom most of the crooks called " Big Scar," were rich with experience. He had the trick of expressing himself in very few words. He would lean back in his easy chair, lift his cord-wrapped pipe from his mouth, and tell of the little journeys he had made through police-haunted cities and hostile farming communities.

In his narratives to Vilos, or whoever happened to be calling, a " yegg " was a safe-blower, while a " rattler " was a freight-car, and " the cushions " were passenger-coaches. He wandered at times in deeper argot and the distinctions of his profession. A safe-blower had other names than " yegg." He might be a " peter-man " or a " blaster " or a " mobs-man " or a " gay-cat " or a " pedler " or even " heavy-man."

Vilos was a good listener. He studied Cragen's face and found a latent strength there which might have placed him at the top of the profession or in affluence. Mike Dugan was of the same type, but the boss had chosen the right road to power. Politics made strange companions. Cragen was Dugan's tool in the underworld.

The projected job, of which Vilos heard very little, was long in maturing. The absence of Major Garrick and Minnie May, the Duchess, caused Cragen to put off the matter until they arrived.

He sounded Vilos one evening. He directed his questions toward a final degree in crime.

" You have everything," he said as the Gipsy stood in the doorway and watched the two men. " You are not known to the police. You don't mix with cheap hooks. You've pride, I guess, and a stubborn disposition that 'll go well in a third degree. I

don't believe you will ever fall, if you let me manage you."

"Hooks?" asked Vilos. "What are hooks?"

"Hooks is another name for crooks." The old man glanced at a bottle of wine and indicated to the Gipsy that it was time to fill up the glasses.

She came forward from the doorway and lifted the bottle. She passed the drinks and poised a glass in her hand as she stood by Vilos.

Cragen crossed his legs. He crammed the tobacco deeper in his pipe with a broad thumb upon which were tiny blue powder marks.

"The language of the mobs is changing," he said. "It is different for the same thing in other localities. A man might be a sucker in the West but he would be a 'John' in this town. You want to note the distinctions, boy. Hickson knows them all."

"Where is he?" asked Vilos. "I haven't seen him around for some time."

"He's out on the derrick, which is lingo for a gun mob, which means he's pickin' pockets with a bunch. It takes three to pick a pocket. First there's the stall and then there's the tool and then comes the instrument who gets the leather. Most instruments have long fingers like you have, boy."

Vilos held out his right hand.

"Is there much money in picking pockets?" he asked.

"Yes! There's many a good box-man and safe-blower gone over to the game. There isn't much danger of a fall. The police of most cities stand in with the mobs. The word is given to wade right in and help yourself. Circuses and county-fairs and balloon ascensions are excellent. You always want to get the pocketbook when the john is looking upward. Or else on a street-car which is crowded. He can't get his hands down from the straps to grab you in case of a rumble, which is an alarm, boy."

Vilos glanced at the Gipsy. She was openly drinking in what the old master was saying.

"Continuing," said Cragen, "there's classes to mobs just the same as there is different sets of society. Some mobs go out on the derrick with a shoe-string bank-roll, an opium lay-out or two, and trust to luck. They usually get pinched before they go very far. Now with Hickson, it's different. He's a swell stall for a very fine instrument who is known as Foley the Goat. Maybe you have met him up here." The old man waved his pipe around the room and pointed toward the doorway which led into the dining-room and the kitchen.

"I met him," said Vilos.

"Foley the Goat has no equal in getting a poke, which is a leather, which is a pocketbook. He twists them skinny fingers around the poke and it comes away. He lets the john walk from the pocketbook. That's the idea, boy. Let the sucker move. Don't move yourself when you get hold of a hot touch. The Gipsy will show you."

Vilos rose from the chair upon which he had been sitting. He turned his side pocket toward the girl. She set down her glass and shook her head after she had turned.

"Not that pocket," she said. "The right breech."

"Right breech, boy," offered Cragen, "is the right hip pocket. It's the one where most of the pokes are. Put something in yours. A handkerchief or a small book."

Vilos pulled a note-book from his inner coat-pocket. He thrust it in his hip-pocket. The Gipsy reached out two slender fingers, spread the lining of the trouser-pocket and pushed Vilos away. He turned in amazement. She had the note-book between her fingers and he had not felt its loss.

"See," said Cragen proudly, "you must let the sucker do the work. It's the first principle of picking pockets."

Vilos sat down. He stared at Cragen.

"There's one thing," he said, "that I don't quite understand. It seems to me that the chances of getting any large sum of money out of a man's pocket are very slim. I suppose it's a big gamble?"

"Not at all," growled Cragen. "The stall and the tool hang around banks and ticket windows and jeweler's offices. They catch a flash of a bank-roll or jewelry. They see where it is placed. Maybe hours later, on a train or a short, which is a street-car, the sucker is robbed."

"Suppose the man who is robbed feels his loss right away?"

"Then the instrument hands it back and shows a detective badge and tells him to be careful next time, or better yet, boy, the tool and the stall block the way while the instrument escapes. That's why there's three in a mob. It's mighty hard to catch the real thief, and the others can stand for a pinch because there's no evidence against *them*."

The Gipsy suddenly lowered her glass and bent her head sidewise.

"I hear steps in the hall," she whispered tersely. "Suppose it's Mr. Dugan."

"Dugan may be up, later," said Cragen. "It's somebody else. Don't open the door till they give the knock. No use taking chances, now."

A low knock, followed by a loud cough and then a scraping of feet on the outside linoleum caused the Gipsy to glide across the room and through the dark hallway. She rattled a chain and turned a key.

"It's two friends," she announced surprisedly. "It's the long-lost major and Minnie May, father. My, but they do look swell."

"And we feel that way!" boomed Major Garrick striding into the room. "We feel that—"

Vilos had risen and stood at Cragen's side.

"What th' hell!" sputtered the astonished major. "What brought you here, Holbrook?"

Vilos glanced over the major's shoulder and full into the eyes of Minnie May, the Duchess. She was gowned in the extreme of fashion. A long blue coat draped to the polished heels of her shoes. Her breast was ample and sparkled with diamonds. Her hands were overjeweled. She raised her arm and thrust up a veil. Her perfectly enameled cheeks bloomed with high color.

"And who is this man?" she intonated as she stared from Vilos to Cragen.

"A frien' of the Sultan's," said Cragen slyly. "Isn't he a friend of yours, Sultan?"

"By God, he was! Hello, Holbrook. I suppose you've been gettin' an earful, around here. It won't do you any good, let me tell you that!"

"He's safe," Cragen said. "I sounded him. Never a squeal in this lad. He took his loss and is lookin' for a way to pull one or two little deals himself. I'll answer for him."

"Oh, if that's the case," said Major Garrick running his eyes over Vilos, "we'll put him in the way of many a good thing—eh, Minnie?"

Minnie May unbuckled her cloak and carefully laid it across a wooden chair. She bobbed her head and laid her hand on the Gipsy's shoulders.

"And how are you dear?" she inquired in low tones. "And how is the boss? You should be nice to him. He's a trump card! I hope you haven't slapped him or driven him away. I do hope you haven't, dear."

The two women disappeared through the doorway and went to the kitchen.

Vilos turned to Major Garrick, who was whispering to Cragen.

He watched the men until his silence caused them to glance upward like suspecting hounds.

"So bygones are bygones," said the beaming major. "Glad of it! You need a new outfit, boy. Oh my, oh my! you must keep better groomed! A little booze helped you down a peg. You don't look the same, at all. Old John Barleycorn is a great fellow!"

Vilos flushed. He glanced at his trousers. He smoothed away a crease or two. His shoes were broken and unpolished.

"Quick work!" chuckled the major. "You were once the glass of fashion and the mold of form. I'll fix that out. I do owe you a good turn for one you did me."

"There's them wot dress too well for their parts," said Cragen, reaching for his tobacco and cramming some into the bowl of his pipe. "Remember the Prince and his silk-topper? He was conspicuous and the coppers got him. You want to look out for that."

The old safe-blower ran a critical eye over the major's clothes. The vest was checkered and crossed with a platinum chain. The necktie was as gorgeous as a sunset in Cuba. The spats might have been of doeskin. The shoes were patent-leather.

Major Garrick reached, twirled a chair

and sat down with the back of the chair between his legs.

He beamed from Vilos to Cragen. "Life's a stage," he said. "I put a *good* one over in the West, because I looked like more money than I had. I helped the sucker look for the man who trimmed him. He didn't think *I* would do a thing like that. Oh, no! Oh, no! But your Uncle Dudley had the boob's money in my kick. He brushed against it once or twice."

Cragen lifted his shaggy brows and removed the pipe from his mouth.

"Suppose you join the ladies," he said to Vilos. The Sultan and I have a little business to transact. That's right, boy."

Vilos beckoned to the Gipsy from the kitchen doorway. She left the duchess sitting by the stove and went out and down the stairs with him. They walked to the corner saloon where they took seats in the back room.

Vilos stared around the room. He caught the eye of the bartender-waiter who was serving customers at another table.

"A couple whiskys," he ordered as the waiter came over to the Gipsy's side.

"No," said the girl, "make mine a very light beer with a little salt."

The waiter nodded, mopped the table and vanished in the direction of the bar. Vilos leaned his elbows on the table.

"Why did you order that?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know." She eyed him directly. She studied his soiled collar. "I think whisky is bad for some people," she said slowly. "People who have imagination should be careful of it."

"And I have imagination?"

"Yes!"

"I never realized it."

"You have imagination and you're an idealist. You came down to our level in six months. That's idealism. You think you'll get rich—or get your money back by crime. That's imagination. You won't!" Vilos felt the girl was very sure of herself.

"Why won't I?" he asked. "Look at the Sultan, or the major. Look at Minnie May. They have money!"

"It is all on the surface. They're rich one day and poor the next. The money you steal, has wings. It's different money than the kind you work for. Besides, the police and the lawyers and the bondsmen get half of what you make. You're always trying to climb out of a well. You go up one jump and down two. You're never getting far ahead, Vilos."

"And yet you are trying to teach me to pick pockets."

The girl remained silent until the waiter served the small beer and the glass of whisky. She stared at the couple in the further corner of the room.

"I'd hate to see you sink too low," she said. "There's nothing in wiles or guiles or knavery. You're working against millions of people. You're trying to swim up against a vast stream called society."

"Society?"

"Yes, society. I've known so many men who have lost their grip on life. They used to flock in to see father. He bailed some of them out. He hired lawyers for the old-timers. He's always throwing his money away to help people. That's why we're poor."

"Who is your father? What did he use to do in the early days."

The Gipsy touched her lips to the glass.

"He was called Big Scar," she said as she glanced across the beer-foam. "He was a safe-blower and bank-robber. He worked with Adam Worth and Little Dick Harris and Chester Fay. He went to Europe with Red Leary and Jimmy Hope and Mike Shinburn. They got in trouble in Paris. Father escaped from a French prison."

"And he's lost his nerve?"

"Yes! They all lose their nerve, Vilos. That's why so many young men are caught in desperate crimes. It takes youth and greenness to do the impossible. That's why father and the others think you will turn out well. Old men hesitate, while young men wade right in. Once arrested, a man or woman is never the same. They're afraid of the law."

Vilos gulped his drink. He watched her sipping her beer.

"Have you ever been arrested?" he asked.

"Yes, twice! Both times Mike Dugan got me out of trouble before I reached prison. All he had to do was to telephone."

Vilos clenched his fists. He opened his hands slowly and laid them, palms upward on the table. He stared at his nails as he bent his fingers. They were slightly soiled.

"Mike Dugan," he asked, "is expected to-night?"

"Father said so."

"Is there any danger for you?"

"No!" She hesitated and added: "I don't think there is. He's always sober and dangerous, though."

Vilos called the bartender and paid his bill. He took his change from a dollar bill and followed the Gipsy to the street. She rounded the corner and started south along Harmine Street. Suddenly she stopped and said tersely, as her warm fingers rested on his arm and gripped the sleeve to his coat:

"He's there!"

"Who?" asked Vilos.

"Mike Dugan. See the taxi."

"That might be the major's."

"No. It's his! Now, I must go."

Vilos hesitated. He glanced up at the tenement. His eyes widened to a lowering sky which seemed to press down on his temples. The thought of the boss sent fire through his veins.

"I'll kill Dugan," he said, "if you ever want me to."

"Thank you."

"I mean it!"

"I know you do. That's why I'm so sure of you. Don't worry. Father is up there."

"Will your father protect you?"

"He has told Dugan to look out. Dugan is up there to-night because the major and the Duchess are in town. They're planning a job that you and I can expect to figure in."

Vilos drew his cap down over his eyes.

"Good-by," said the Gipsy, suddenly thrusting out her right hand. "Good night, Vilos."

He raised his eyes and met the direct stare that flashed from beneath the brim of her wide hat. He glanced at the taxi and then up at the lighted windows of the tenement.

"Good night, Gipsy," he said.

"Good night, pal," came back like an echo as she hurried by the silent taxi and turned into the dingy entrance of Flannagan's Flats.

CHAPTER VIII.

"LURE OF LARCENY."

IN a certain Eastern city there is no name more honored than that of Dr. S. Frank Twitchell.

It was Dr. Twitchell who once made the statement that all men over sixty, and the majority of men criminally inclined, should be done away with by means of chloroform.

The doctor's mansion faces a quiet park. It is near to an old church, from the belfry of which some patriot had hung a lantern or rang a bell in the days of the Revolution.

"Who's Who" rates Dr. Twitchell as A. I. He figures often in press notices. His world-wide fame and his deep attention to his profession—particularly in nervous troubles—bring many visitors and patients up his white, scrubbed steps.

It was therefore not a coincidence that after a railway journey of two hours a group of three—Vilos, Minnie May, and the Gipsy—descended from an open victoria and mounted the doctor's stoop. They waited after ringing the bell. They glanced at each other. The plan laid down by Cragen was about to be tried out. It was to be a simple case of larceny wherein the good doctor was a tool, without his knowledge.

Twitchell was deep in the writing of a pamphlet on "Mental Aberration and Paranoics," when his man-servant brought in the visitors' cards. They were good cards—well engraved.

They read: "Mrs. Martin Osborne, Miss Roberta Osborne, and Mr. Frederick Osborne."

"Who are these people?" asked the aged savant. "I don't know them."

"They look very proper, sir," said the servant.

"Proper," is a key to many doors. The doctor laid down his pen, blotted and folded his manuscript, and rose from the writing table of his great, dark library. He peered through his double-power glasses as the

man-servant admitted Minnie May, the Gipsy, and Vilos.

"Oh, doctor!" exclaimed the Duchess as she rushed forward. "I'm so glad," she purred as she took the savant's bony hand. "So glad to find you in."

Twitchell adjusted his acid-stained smoking jacket and beamed upon the Duchess.

"You see," said Minnie May," I am quite well and my daughter, Roberta, is quite well. Poor Freddy is not well. That's the reason I brought him to you, doctor. He is so queer."

Vilos assumed a far-away look and glanced at the crystal globe over the savant's polished head. The doctor stepped forward and started a mental diagnosis which ended by a knowing shake of his head. He turned and stared at Minnie May.

"He is your natural son?"

"Yes, yes!" said the Duchess.

The savant examined the cards. "You call him Frederick!"

"Oh, yes. He is twenty-seven, but doctor, he has the brains and the intellect of a child of seven. You see, doctor, he is just a boy who never grew up, like other boys."

Vilos had been made up for the part. He had closely shaven. His shoes were square-toed. His trousers, though long, were spidery and youthful.

The savant studied him over the top of his great glasses. He glanced for a second time at the cards. "Fox Chase," he said to the Duchess. "Are you the Mrs. Osborne of Fox Chase?"

"Yes!" breathed Minnie May. "Of Fox Chase and Newport. I do hope that you have time to diagnose my son's trouble. It is very queer and peculiar."

Vilos raised his hand toward the overhead dome.

"See," he said. "See the big pearl."

The Duchess started to sob short, throaty sobs. She sank into a chair as the savant motioned to one. The Gipsy glided to Vilos's side and took his hand.

"That isn't a pearl," she said. "That's a lamp."

Twitchell bowed his head and listened to the poignant offering from the Duchess. He grew nervous. He turned to her.

"What is it you wish me to do?" he asked. "Do you want to leave your son here and let me examine him? I have a nice quiet observation ward in the back of the house."

The Duchess dried her eyes. She stared at the savant. "I might as well tell you the whole truth," she said. "I have another son who is similarly afflicted. They both have the same trouble. They inherited it from their father. They both believe that everything bright is a jewel of some kind—a diamond or a ruby or a pearl. Freddy is milder than Launcelot."

Twitchell became interested. The mention of the father brought up heredity. The doctor was a believer in primogeniture and atavism. He had written a brochure on the subject. He rubbed his dry hands and glanced at Vilos with renewed interest.

"So Launcelot is similarly afflicted? This young man isn't so bad. Fresh air—nourishment and plenty of exercise should work toward a cure."

Minnie May arched her penciled brows and said:

"It came from the father's side of the family. I shall send you our coat of arms and family history. I wonder if you knew that my husband was considered a great authority on precious stones? He had a most wonderful collection of gems. His pearls were even envied by the Raja of Mysore." Minnie May had taken a chance on the pronunciation of the title.

"From the father's side," said the doctor. "It is not strange. Who has examined your two sons?"

"Helmstein of Berlin. Also Professor Pascal of the Sorbonne. They said that Launcelot's was the most unusual case they had ever diagnosed. You know, doctor, he is always taking pebbles and beads and wrapping them up and carrying them around to the neighbors at Fox Chase. He tells everybody he's from some famous jeweler like Green Rose & Fink, or Waldenstein's or Harriet & Hartley."

The savant turned toward the Gipsy with professional concern. "And you," he asked, "are sane and normal?"

"I hope so!" exclaimed the Duchess indignantly. "My daughter has more sense

than I have. She takes care of poor Launcelot, who is always delivering mythical pearls and diamonds in boxes."

The savant gazed at the Gipsy's pagan beauty. "I shall be glad to be of service," he said. "When can I see Launcelot?"

The Gipsy nodded toward Minnie May. "When had you better send him, mother?" she asked.

The Duchess opened a gold mesh-bag and glanced at an engagement book. She snapped the book shut and said:

"To-morrow! I shall send him to you about three o'clock, to-morrow. I must make up a little package of beads and address them to you. I'll tell him to say he is from some great jewelers. Then you see, doctor, he won't suspect anything. He will act the same way with you as he does with my neighbors at Fox Chase.

"You know," continued the Duchess with an arch glance of warmth toward the wrinkled savant. "You know, professor, the people in my set keep these little things to ourselves. I wouldn't for the world let it be known in town that I have two afflicted sons. With Frederick, it is different than with Launcelot. I can take Frederick on shopping tours and to the musicals. I want you to cure my other boy. Is the room where you will put him very strong, doctor?"

The savant rubbed his hands and thought of another chapter he would add to his brochure on "Atavism."

"Strong enough—and padded," he said as the Duchess started to sob and dab her face with her handkerchief. She smiled finally and fastened upon Twitchell the fine glance of a mother concerned about her son.

"To-morrow at two," she whispered. "To-morrow, doctor, Launcelot will come to you with his little box of beads or pebbles. Don't be rough with him, doctor, for my sake."

Twitchell saw the pseudo Mrs. Osborne gather her laces and sweep from the room. He parted the curtains and peered through a narrow opening.

He caught a flash of Minnie May's taper ankles as she climbed into the hired victoria. He dropped the curtains as the vehicle rounded the square and vanished eastward. He rubbed his hands dryly. The case for to-morrow promised to be worthy of a separate chapter in his new book.

The Duchess, very warm and with some of her enamel cracked by the unusual stress of emotion, leaned from her seat in the victoria and intonated to the hired driver:

"Drive very rapidly to Waldenstein's."

Waldenstein's was one of the city's three great jewelers. It was an old established house known for its conservatism and reliability. Its windows were usually graced with the latest pearls and gems set in platinum that was worth over a hundred and fifty dollars an ounce.

Vilos had been coached in the part he was to play. Cragen had mapped out the entire swindle. There was little or no chance of a slip-up. The hired victoria was the best of its kind to be had in the town. It had been ordered by guests of one of the largest hotels, and that was all the driver knew concerning his patrons.

Vilos moved to the front seat when the vehicle drew up before Waldensteins', and Minnie May and the Gipsy were assisted to alight by the jeweler's gorgeously costumed footman. The driver was perched upon his box in such a manner that he could be easily bowled over. Cragen had been careful of this point. A pair of fast horses might be necessary when the Duchess made her exit from the shop with the Gipsy.

Waldenstein, senior, was examining a fresh consignment of diamonds received that day from Holland when the Duchess and the Gipsy swept into the store.

With her bridges metaphorically burned, Minnie May charged down the clerk-lined aisles. She was after a certain rope of pearls which had figured in newspaper accounts.

Waldenstein laid down his favorite glass after unscrewing it from his eye like a monocle. He peered toward the door which separated the diamond room from the store. He rose as the Duchess burst in upon him and said:

"I'm Mrs. Twitchell — Mrs. Frank Twitchell. This is my daughter Roberta. Roberta, meet Mr. Waldenstein."

The Gipsy bowed shyly as the great jeweler stared at her.

"I've come to purchase some pearls," said Minnie May boldly. "I've heard so much of your pearls. They even speak of your house in Paris."

"I have no house in Paris," said the bewildered jeweler.

"No! No!" exclaimed the duchess. "The people of Paris speak of this great establishment."

Waldenstein glanced down as Minnie May pressed forward two engraved cards. He turned and lifted up a pair of tortoise-shell glasses. He focused his eyes on the cards. They were well engraved. They read: "Mrs. Frank Twitchell. Miss Roberta Twitchell."

"Oh," said the jeweler, "your husband is—"

"Yes, he is," purred the Duchess. "You see I have just returned from Paris and Havre. We've opened our town house. And, so I must have some pearls for the season. Big ones, you can't fascinate me with anything else."

Although the diamond room was not small, the Duchess dominated it completely. The Gipsy stood aside and listened to Minnie May's perfect intonations—her little "Aha's!" and her direct "Won't do!" as Waldenstein drew out tray after tray of pearls and mixed pearls and diamonds.

"You have a fair assortment," the Duchess said, "but not what I expected from reports. Of course, I can go elsewhere," she added.

Waldenstein was lulled beyond hope of ever escaping from the Duchess's persuasion. He breathed the air from her shaken laces and felt like a man in an Eastern temple. His brain soared in exotic raptures. Henna and myrh, and the rare odor of poppies, completed the capture.

He turned and replaced the trays within their steel-lined shelves. "I have something very fine," he said. "Something I show to very few patrons."

"What is it?" asked the Duchess.

"A necklace of pink pearls which were part of the collection of Sir Rufus Hoyt who died in London. I purchased them from the Hoyt estate. They have increased greatly in value."

"Let me see them," said Minnie May.

"Oh, yes, do let us see them," added the Gipsy.

Waldenstein glanced at the half-opened door of the diamond room. He felt his arm gripped lightly by the Duchess.

"Do let us see them," she intonated. "Perhaps the doctor will buy them for me, if they are not too much."

The jeweler turned his eyes from the door and stooped to a small black strong-box which had a double-dial. He twirled these dials and clicked open the combination locks. He thrust his olive-hued hand into a compartment and brought forth a small, flat package.

He rose and untied the package, which was bound with a blue string. He smiled and held out a rope of pearls which at first seemed lusterless to the Gipsy and Minnie May.

"Watch them," said the jeweler. His hand moved until the pearls were between Minnie May and the good north light which streamed through a ground-glass transom. "Now, what do you think?" asked Waldenstein.

"Oh!" said the Gipsy. "Oh, look."

"I'm looking, daughter," said Minnie May. "They are rather remarkable."

"Two hundred and seventeen matched pearls," said the jeweler. The pendant was once the pride of a grand duke's collection."

"It would be a shame to break them up," thought the Duchess. "How much do you ask for them?" she said aloud.

Waldenstein laid the pearls on a blue-velvet mat and removed a gold pencil from his pocket. He turned one of the calling cards over and wrote: "$82,000," in fine script. He showed the figures to the Duchess.

She flipped the card across her polished nails.

"Your lowest price?" she asked.

"My lowest price, Mrs. Twitchell."

"Roberta, are you satisfied with them?"

The Gipsy reached for the pearls. She lifted them and held them against the duchess's neck. She smiled into the anxious eyes of the jeweler.

"I like them," she said simply.

Minnie May glanced at the box from which Waldenstein had taken the rope of pearls.

"Would you mind sealing them up and sending them over to the doctor's at three to-morrow?" she said. "I'm sure he will buy them on account."

Waldenstein had the cross-indexed brain of a high-class merchant. He knew that Dr. Frank Twitchell was financially responsible for anything he signed for. He seemed to be taking no chances at all in sending the pearls to the doctor's house on consignment.

"Certainly!" he said. "I'd be pleased to send them over to the doctor's—but why seal them?"

"It's the custom in London and Paris," said Minnie May haughtly as she lifted her enameled chin.

"Oh, so it is," said the jeweler. "I'll seal them in this box and send them over."

The Gipsy watched the pearls vanish into the box. She saw Waldenstein get out a tiny spirit lamp, a stick of wax and a gold seal. She leaned over the table and rested her elbows on the blue-velvet mat.

"May I see them once more?" she asked as Waldenstein was heating the wax. "Just once."

The jeweler lifted the tissue-paper which covered the pearls. The Gipsy leaned further over the table. "Oh, how lovely!" she said without touching them. "My, they are like a glimpse into the bottom of the ocean."

Waldenstein tied the box with three knots. He pressed the seal upon the drops of wax and then turned toward the little strong-box with its double-dial combination.

"I'll send them at three, to-morrow," he said as he closed the door of the safe and turned toward the Duchess. "The address is in Garden Square?"

"Yes, No 4," said the Duchess. "I'll have a talk with the doctor to-night. He's promised me a present for ever so long."

"And I do love pearls!" added the Gipsy as she glided out of the diamond room.

The parade down through the clerk-lined aisles of Waldenstein's, made by the Gipsy and the Duchess with the great jeweler bringing up the rear, was the final triumph of the hour.

Minnie May smiled and breathed upon her escort. She pointed her mesh-bag at the silver-counter, the gold-cases and the rare objects of art which graced the shelves of the great establishment.

She touched Waldenstein's hand and ran her fingers over his sleeve. She gripped his arm as she paused a moment to admire a cloisonné vase. She went on between the counters with her voice bubbling and gurgling and growing sweeter.

The door was near. She measured the number of steps necessary to reach the carriage. She saw the footman standing at attention with one hand holding the knob, and the other at his cap.

A sharp-eyed man in black clothes and derby hat stood at the diamond counter. He turned and stared, first at the Gipsy and then at the Duchess. His eyes passed to Waldenstein. There was no signal flashed between the two men. Minnie May was sure of that as she reached the door to the outside.

The man was the store detective.

The Gipsy waited as the victoria rolled up. Minnie May smiled for the last time on the jeweler as he stood barehead in the sun.

"You will send them by your regular messenger?" she asked.

Waldenstein nodded. "I have a man who has been with me a number of years," he said. "A young fellow who is learning the business. He always delivers precious packages."

"The reason I asked you that," said the Duchess, "is because the doctor may send back his check. I really think he will. Would it be an accommodation to you if he did?"

"It would," said the jeweler truthfully.

"Then good-by, and thank you."

The Gipsy paused on the stone in front of the establishment. She bowed to Waldenstein. She stepped into the victoria. The Duchess followed her and said distinctly to the driver:

"The Ritz, William!"

Waldenstein rubbed his hands as he saw the carriage dash away. He even clapped the store detective on the back when he entered the establishment.

"I've sold the Hoyt necklace, Joe."

"Who to?"

"Dr. Frank Twitchell's wife."

"A very stunning woman!" declared the sleuth.

CHAPTER IX.

"PINK PEARLS."

MINNIE MAY, the Duchess, was in rare good humor during the ride to the hotel. She cautioned Vilos and the Gipsy with a side-glance at the driver of the victoria. She beamed upon her two confederates and stared at the streets of the city as if she owned a number of the prominent buildings and the blue sky above them.

She had carried out the major's instructions to the letter. The game of separating Waldenstein from his famous string of peals was one-half done. There seemed, in her mind, no chance for a slip-up in the little matter of collecting the spoils at 3 P.M. on the day to follow.

Cragen, Hickson, and the major had laid out the plan. It savored of old brains and young tools. The Duchess tore her gaze from the passing throng and fixed it upon Vilos and the Gipsy. She beamed again at the perfect picture of respectability. She would have liked to say any number of things, but the presence of the driver sealed her lips.

The victoria drew up before the side entrance of the hotel. A flunky darted out. Minnie May leaned toward the driver and pressed into his hand a five-dollar bill.

"You may call to-morrow at two fifteen," she said. "I shall not need you until then."

To Vilos, as the flunkey swung open the hotel door, the Duchess remarked:

"We'll go into the ivory room. I'm just perishing for a pot of tea."

Minnie May's pot of tea consisted of two double-dry Martinis, swallowed one after the other.

She braced back, pulled out her vanity-box, and started powdering her nose. Her eyes wandered over the throng of afternoon diners and drinkers. She appraised the place with the ranging eye of a connoisseur in crime and values. Her eyes dropped to Vilos, who looked strangely youthful.

"Frederick," she said, "if it wasn't for the Gipsy, I don't know how I would have succeeded to-day. She's the best little stall in the world."

This was praise from a professional. The Gipsy flushed.

"I did my best, mama," she said.

Minnie May grew serious with sudden thought. "You shouldn't have disturbed him after he started to wrap them up. It's always good form to let a boob alone if he's going right. Suppose he had suspected something then?"

"He didn't," said the Gipsy with a slow smile. "He was so overpowered by your perfumery and your presence he forgot everything else."

The Duchess rose. She swept the ivory room with a cool glance.

"I'm going up to my room," she said. "You and Vilos take a walk. Go any place but near Waldenstein's or the doctor's. Don't queer things there."

It was at the corner of a green park where Vilos stopped and turned to the Gipsy.

"I like the Duchess," he said, "but she is too domineering. She is like the major—they want to be captains or they won't play."

The Gipsy smiled the same slow smile of feminine wisdom.

Vilos walked on in thought. He turned now and then and stared at the Gipsy. She was studying the shop windows and the automobile agencies.

"If we ever make a big touch, we'll have one of them," he said, pointing to a green-and-gold sedan. "Do you think we'll ever make the big touch?"

"Never!" said the Gipsy. "Never, unless we do it alone. The money goes too many ways."

"This pearl job?"

"There's you and me and the Duchess and the major and father and Mike Dugan in it. The pearls won't sell to a receiver for more than ten or fifteen thousand dollars. That means less than two thousand between you and me."

"Who gets the big end?"

"Mike Dugan. He has his hand in everything."

Vilos closed his fists. He turned and grasped the Gipsy's arm.

"I'm going to take you back to the hotel," he said. "Then I'm going to my hotel. I want a good sleep to-night. Cragen—your father—told me so many things to avoid, to-morrow, I've got to think them all over. You see, I have got a lot to learn. I could hardly help lighting a cigarette in that victoria while I was waiting for you and the Duchess to come out. But a cigarette would most assuredly have given me dead away."

The Gipsy nodded and cuddled her arm within his own.

"It's never too late to learn," she said as they turned toward the south.

Vilos awoke at the Stag Hotel, where he had taken a room, and peered out through the blinds. It was late morning. He dressed, had breakfast, and hurried to the Ritz. There he waited all of two hours for Minnie May and the Gipsy to come down.

The Gipsy appeared finally. She nodded toward the ivory room. They took seats at a small table.

"Where's the Duchess?" asked Vilos smilingly.

The Gipsy patted her cheeks with her finger-tips. She held up a butter chip and made believe it was a vanity-mirror.

"Fixin' up," she said. "She'll be down when the enamel dries. She's got a new kind that takes awfully long."

The Duchess finally appeared and sailed across the ivory room like a frigate under all canvas. She pounced upon a waiter and ordered a Martini. She sat down at the table and leaned her elbows between Vilos and the Gipsy.

"Get busy!" she said without moving her lips. "You, Vilos, run along to Waldenstein's and watch for that messenger to come out. He'll take a short to the doctor's. It's almost two o'clock now. So, get busy."

"A short?" asked Vilos.

"A street-car. You tail him and see if there is anybody else coming along. They might have suspected something and framed us up."

Vilos rose after drinking down a Manhattan and passing the cherry to the Gipsy.

"I'm off," he said, adjusting his tie. "I'll follow the messenger from the jeweler's. If there is any sign of suspicion, how shall I notify you?"

"Come quickly to the doctor's and ring the bell five times. The Gipsy and I will be in the reception-room. We can beat it before the trouble arrives, if it does arrive."

Vilos passed between the tables of the ivory room and left the hotel by the side entrance. He glanced at his watch. It was five minutes after two. The carriage which would convey Minnie May and the Gipsy to Dr. Twitchell's was due in ten minutes. Moving rapidly, and with his brain active, he crossed the street and hurried in the direction of Waldenstein's. The jeweler's was five blocks from the hotel. Vilos paused on the opposite corner, struck a match against his heel, and lighted a cigarette. He eyed the only possible exit out of which the messenger could come.

Minnie May and Cragen, before her, had ascertained the general appearance of Waldenstein's messengers. The odds were that a young man would be sent with the pearls. Minnie May had prepared for this event by describing Launcelot as about the age of Vilos.

The door of the establishment was opened three times before Vilos dropped his cigarette, pulled down his cap, and started trailing a slender young man whose coat was slightly buttoned about his breast.

This young man had glanced keenly about the street before he left the front of Waldenstein's. He went north a square, waited on a corner, then signaled a trolley-car. Vilos caught the rear platform after a sharp run. He stared at everybody in the car save the young man. He remembered Cragen's instructions.

The trolley reached Garden Square. Vilos swung off a block behind the messenger. He hurried toward the house and mounted the doctor's steps as the young man was pressing the bell.

"Aren't you Launcelot Osborne?" asked Vilos with a broad smile. "Why, I'm sure you are!"

The messenger frowned and pressed his right hand against his breast, where an oblong bulge showed.

"You're mistaken," he said coldly. "I'm not—"

The door opened suddenly. The man servant thrust out his head. He saw two young men standing together.

"Come in, sirs," he said. "The doctor is expecting one of you."

The messenger from Waldenstein's removed his hat. He stood in the hallway as Vilos glided toward the reception-room, where Minnie May and the Gipsy sat waiting.

"My brother's here," Vilos said distinctly. "I wanted him to come alone, but he wouldn't. He's out there."

Vilos pointed toward the shadowy form of the messenger.

"Oh, come right in!" exclaimed the duchess, springing to her feet. "Come right in. Doctor, here he is!" she called.

The messenger stepped through the curtains. He opened his coat. He drew from an inner pocket a package with three red seals.

Twitchell appeared from his study. He was too late to hear the Duchess whisper to the messenger.

"Give me the jewels. I'm Mrs. Twitchell. You can get a check from the doctor. That's right. Now, see him about the check."

The messenger released his rather tight hold on the packet. He stepped to the doctor.

"I have brought the pearls your wife ordered," he said. "The finest ones we had, too," he added.

Twitchell beamed through his glasses. He rubbed his scaly hands. He reached out toward the young man.

"Come closer, Launcelot," he cackled. "My, my! What a wonderful thing it is to see pearls in stones! Come, my boy—my dear boy!"

The messenger grew red. He started to turn toward the Duchess. The doctor clapped his hands. Two burly servants appeared through the curtains. They seized the messenger and bore him to the floor. They sat on him, despite his struggles.

"Come on while we can," whispered Minnie May to Vilos and the Gipsy.

The sounds which issued from the house, despite the closed door and windows, were all that might be expected from a private mad-house. The messenger from Waldenstein's was overpowered by sheer weight of numbers. Vilos, on the stoop, with his ear to the keyhole, heard the doctor's voice bidding the servants carry Launcelot to the observation-room, which was undoubtedly padded and fitted with a strong lock.

Minnie May and the Gipsy vanished in the direction of the hotel. Vilos started after them. He rounded a corner, glanced back, then hurried to the Duchess's side.

"All fine!" he said, breathing tensely. "Where's the victoria?"

"Sent it away," said Minnie May. "We're not going to the Ritz. We're going to charter the fastest taxi in the city and break all speed laws to the nearest railroad station. Call one!"

Vilos glanced at the Gipsy.

"Yes, get one," she said. "For goodness' sake, get a taxi, Vilos. The Duchess is excited."

Minnie May paused in her stride and patted her breast. She stared back over the almost deserted street.

"There's one," she said between rigid lips. "There's one—get it!"

A deep-sea bucker, with an ancient cab, heard Vilos shout. He glanced around, put on his brake, and then backed the taxi. He turned in two attempts and rolled to where Minnie May and the Gipsy were standing.

Vilos assisted them to enter the cab. He sprang on the seat by the driver.

"Drive," he said, "to the North Street Station. We've got to catch the four o'clock train."

The driver knew his route. He set his taximeter and shifted through clanging gears to high speed. He reached the North Street Station about three minutes before train-time.

Minnie May swept aboard the train and charged down through the parlor-car until she came to an empty stateroom. The Pullman conductor bowed her into this room. The porter raised the blinds as Vilos and

the Gipsy leaned back on the cushions. The train pulled out and started through the suburbs.

Flashing visions of wooden cows, dollar watches, and Turkish-bath signs dotted the open landscape as the train roared eastward.

"Gee!" said Minnie May, as she felt her ample bosom to see if the package was safe. "Gee, but that was some finish! The old doctor certainly fell on poor Launcelot."

Vilos rose and pressed the button beneath the center window of the stateroom.

"What will you have?" he asked the Gipsy. "I think we ought to order something."

Minnie May beamed upon the dusky porter as he appeared.

"George," she said, "have you any wine?"

"There's a little, miss. I think there's a bottle of Rhine wine and a bottle of champagne in the ice-box. I's sure about the champagne. It 'll be eight dollars, miss. You see, wine is high."

"Bring it—bring it!" said Minnie May. "Serve it with three glasses. And be sure it's not too cold."

"Here's how," chortled the Duchess as the porter brought the wine. "Here's to crime! Drink and forget that there are any police in the world. We got away with it! We can't lose if we play it high enough."

The Gipsy and Vilos sat down together. They slowly sipped the glasses of Rhine wine which the Duchess ordered after the champagne was consumed.

"Here's how," they repeated like two children.

Vilos studied the irresistible Duchess. He compared her with the Gipsy. Minnie May was one of those rare flowers that bloomed overluxuriously in the miasmatic swamps of the hidden world. She shone like a lily that was slowly passing into decay. She fought, with every art of cosmetics and the hair-dressers, for her brief span in the light. Her enameled cheeks, rouged lips, penciled brows, and padded figure were set in a wilderness of lace and silk—enhanced by the subtle art of a master dressmaker.

She was only natural when under the influence of wine or other drink. She sparkled and gushed with her quick wit driving through the minds of men and women. She had been the best "gun-moll" in the world. The major had often stated that Minnie May had no equal in the high art of wheedling people out of their savings. Cragen had explained to Vilos that a gun-moll was a confidence queen or a pickpocket's first assistant.

Vilos had not dropped too far into the underworld to forget that the Duchess was, and must be considered, a lady. He never made the mistake of underrating her sensibilities. She had the pride of all the women of her type. She demanded respect upon every occasion.

In some manner he understood her and could fathom what next she would say. He followed her mind, and knew that she was no mystery to him or any other man who knew her. She was a good fellow—egotistical, demanding, and full of heart for the underdogs of the world.

With the Gipsy it was different. Vilos never knew what she would say or do. He had given up trying to understand her. She was the riddle—woman. Her life had been pure in act, save for the little matter of larceny, which Cragen held to be but one of the workings of the law of the survival of the fittest.

This law was bound to operate against a criminal action. The crook and the gun-moll might succeed for years, but the end would come when the fittest, who were the honest people of this earth, had their day.

Vilos half-closed his eyes on the ride and thought the matter out. They had got away with a string of pearls. The package rested in the Duchess's ample bosom. There was slight danger that Dr. Twitchell would release the mythical Launcelot for some time. The more the messenger raved and denied his identity, the more crazy the savant would believe him to be.

The danger, if any, to the enterprise would come in the home city. The description of the Duchess would be wired to police headquarters. Sweeney would call at the flat for his end of the swag. Other detectives might be wise enough to guess who had committed the larceny. They might,

or they might not, act decently in the matter. It was all a question of Dugan's hold upon them.

Vilos rose from his seat by the silent Gipsy and rubbed the moisture from the window. He peered out at a flying landscape of signs and trees and low factories. He turned toward the Duchess, whose eyes were closed in thought or sleep.

"We're almost there," he said. "I think I better separate from you two and go back into the smoker. I'll follow you and see if everything is all right."

Minnie May placed her jeweled hand over her mouth. She fluttered her eyebrows.

"Very well," she said, feeling her breast as her hand lowered from her mouth. "Keep well up to us. I'm going to pull off a quick sprint. A taxi for me—if it's only three blocks."

The conductor opened the door to the parlor-car. The porter appeared with a whisk-broom. Vilos tossed him a half-dollar and glided to the front of the train, where the smoking-car was located. He swung from the platform at the station and glanced around for the duchess and the Gipsy. They flitted to a stairway and down to the street. They climbed into a waiting taxi.

No one was following them. Vilos headed the taxi off at a corner and called to the driver. He climbed inside and sat down between the Duchess and the Gipsy. The ride to Harmine Street was made in silence. They dismissed the man at the corner saloon and hurried toward Flannagan's Flats. Night had dropped a swift mantle upon the city. The wagons roared. Late shoppers and clerks thronged the streets leading westward from the avenues. Push-carts and Italian vendors called their wares. Vilos glanced up at the mean windows of Flannagan's Flats, and saw that Cragen's was lighted.

He followed the Duchess and the Gipsy until they stood on the third landing. The Gipsy knocked upon the door with her knuckles, shuffled her feet, and coughed.

Cragen, in trousers and red shirt, thrust out his head as the key was turned and the chain removed.

"Ah, my little ones!" he said. "Come in, everybody. Mike Dugan and the Sultan and Hickson have been waiting around to see how things came off. I never knew a mob to fail in getting something out of the place you went to. But it's a bad burg to go back to. Remember that!"

Shaded lights and a group of three men greeted Vilos, Minnie May, and the Gipsy as they trooped after Cragen and entered the sitting-room.

The major, resplendent in a new vest and a plaid tie, rose and bowed with Old-World gallantry. Mike Dugan uncoiled his thick legs and towered over the Gipsy's slight form. Hickson dragged at a cigarette and smirked toward Minnie May.

"What luck?" he asked. "Did you get the rope of pearls?"

"I got them!" said Minnie May, glancing around the room.

Dugan approached the Gipsy.

She turned, threw back her head, and stared toward him with slitted eyebrows. She lowered her glance as the big boss smiled slowly. She turned toward the duchess.

"Let them see the pearls," she said. "Do let them see the pearls, Minnie. You were so clever and smart, I felt like a little fool."

Minnie May swelled under the girl's flattery. She reached into her breast and removed the packet. She held it out. It was sealed with three red seals and bound with a blue string. There was no address upon it. The jeweler's name was printed in one corner.

The Duchess took her time in opening the package. It was her night and her hour. She laid the blue string on a chair, pulled a hatpin from her hat, and started picking at the three seals.

She finally opened the packet and tore off the covering of tissue paper. The pearls lay like a coiled serpent in a nest of blue plush.

Dugan reached out his thick fingers and snatched them to the light. He turned them; he appraised them.

"Two hundred and seventeen, and a pendant," lisped the Duchess babyishly. "My, but how I hate to break them up!"

"I'll do the breakin'," growled the boss. "I'll send the major to a friend o' mine who knows pearls."

"Oh, give them to me!" said the Gipsy.

Dugan turned.

"You'll get more than that some day," he said. "Wait till you're Mrs. Dugan."

"I'd rather steal them than get them that way!" exclaimed the Gipsy as she reached back and grasped Vilos by the hand.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIRST SHADOW.

THE major, otherwise the Sultan, who was in good standing with the police and the fences, undertook the sale of the necklace. It was a week after their return from the trip before Vilos and the Gipsy received the first division of the spoils.

"Tough stuff," explained the major, mopping his brow after the long climb to Cragen's flat. "Two receivers I knew wouldn't touch the pearls. I got a raise out of a third fence who is going to send the necklace to the port of missing gems."

"Break them up?" asked Vilos as he counted five hundred dollars in hundred-dollar bills.

"No. They go to the China coast—Shanghai—which is the best place for queer stuff like pearls or sables or big stones."

Vilos pocketed the money and turned toward the Gipsy.

"Let's go out," he suggested. "I feel rich to-night."

The major removed his overcoat, set his walking-stick in one corner of the room, and drew up a chair beside Cragen.

The Gipsy appeared at the door with her tan coat on. She beckoned to Vilos. He bowed and followed her toward the kitchen, where she turned and waited for him.

"Reach that baking-powder tin," she said, pointing to a high shelf. "I want something I put in there a long time ago."

Vilos climbed upon a coal-box, balanced himself, and jumped down with the can. He handed it to the Gipsy. She twisted the lid and drew out a small revolver.

"In case Mike Dugan starts anything," she explained as she thrust the gun in her pocket. "He's been bothering me ever since we came back. He wrote me two notes. I tore them up without letting father see them. Father will have it out with him some day."

Vilos glanced toward the sitting-room.

"Come, let's go out and up to the corner," he said. "We can talk in Connor's and figure out some way of getting Mike Dugan."

The Gipsy ordered a soft drink as they reached the back room of the saloon and sat down at a table. Vilos indicated to the waiter that he would have straight whisky. He leaned back and stared at the Gipsy.

"What did he say in the two notes?" he asked.

"Nothing—except he wanted me to meet him at a place up-town."

"What sort of a place?"

"The Café Nicholas. There are private dining-rooms there. You wouldn't catch me in a private room with him."

Vilos waited until the waiter had set the drinks upon the table. He leaned forward and raised his glass.

"I'm going down fast enough," he said, touching his lips to the whisky, "but it's either Dugan or the electric chair for me. I won't see you hounded, Gipsy."

She lifted her ginger-ale and sipped at it. She glanced warmly beneath her broad hat.

"Don't kill him till I say *when*," she said. "Don't let father do it, either. I've got a gun, and I can take care of myself."

The Gipsy's lips were invitingly red. She dropped her hand across the table and clutched Vilos's fingers.

"Don't worry so," she said. "We've got five hundred apiece and more coming."

"Did you answer the notes?" asked Vilos, staring about the deserted room.

"No. That's what makes him so mad. He'll be down soon—maybe to-night. Let's go up-town. Take me to some of the old places you used to go to before you knew me."

Vilos sprang out of his chair. "Come on," he said, fishing the change for the drinks out of his trouser-pocket. "We'll go to the Café Nicholas. We'll take a pri-

vate room. We'll drink some wine to Mike Dugan, who don't own everybody."

They left the saloon and took a taxi. They got out at a brilliantly lighted corner, and linked arms as they paraded a bright thoroughfare. They stared at the electric signs, at the women in ermine and sables leaving the opera-house. They retraced their steps and went up-town.

It was 2 A.M. when Vilos stepped out of the Café Nicholas and sought for a taxi. His brain reeled from the wine he had drunk. His steps were unsteady as he attempted to pilot the Gipsy across the sidewalk.

She had the saving grace of knowing when to stop drinking. Her eyes were keen as she swept the faces of the passers-by before she got into the taxi. She saw a skulking figure dodge out of sight as the taxi started forward and jerked her down on the rear seat.

Rubbing the glass with her handkerchief, she stared out. Mike Dugan appeared. The big boss grasped the shoulder of the flunky who acted as cab-starter, whispered into his ear, then he hurried through the doorway where the telephone-booths and check-stands were located.

"He's been waiting for us to come out all night," said the Gipsy.

"Who's been waiting?" asked Vilos.

"Mike Dugan. I saw him back there."

Vilos dropped his head into his hands. He raised his eyes and swung them toward the Gipsy, who was huddled in one corner of the swaying taxi. He reached out unsteadily and felt within her pocket. His fingers coiled around the little revolver.

He drew it out and stared at it.

"I'll take care of this," he said. "Perhaps we'll need it to-night."

They dismissed the taxi at Connor's saloon and started walking in the direction of Flannagan's Flats. It was after three o'clock by Vilos's watch.

He stepped close to the Gipsy as she paused before the entrance of the tenement. She turned swiftly. Two blurred figures were crouching in the hallway. They came out, squinted, then sprang down the steps. Vilos felt himself bowled over by a punch from the leader of the detectives.

He reeled and spun into the center of the street. He fell down, then rose to one elbow. He drew the gun as the Gipsy screamed.

Resting his hand upon his right wrist, he took aim and pulled the trigger. The hammer clicked. He lowered the revolver and stared at it.

He raised his glance and attempted to get to his feet. The Gipsy, closely held by the two detectives, was being hurried toward the corner. Around this corner appeared the black hood and the tonneau of a touring-car.

A sharp exhaust in the muffler, a clang and roar of gears in second speed, and a fleeting glimpse of blue smoke rising in the night air was the final chapter of the arrest. The two detectives had been tipped off by Mike Dugan. Sweeney had not appeared. Vilos stood swaying in the center of the street—piecing the event together. He pocketed the revolver, which was not loaded. He knew the two detectives. One was Cassady and the other was Calvin Crimm, of police headquarters. The Gipsy was on her way to prison because of the pearl robbery.

Cragen heard the news with livid face. He had sprang out of bed as Vilos woke the echoes of the tenement by pounding on the door.

The old man slipped on a pair of pantaloons and lighted a gas-jet with a shaking hand. He sat down on the edge of the bed and studied the matting. Finally he raised his head.

"You can't do anything to-night," he said. "She's locked up in a cell already. Probably there's a bench warrant for her. You must see Abe Simpson first thing in the morning. Abe will get her out, in spite of Dugan and his ring. Abe is a frien' of ours."

"The lawyer?" asked Vilos.

"The swellest mouthpiece in this town. He's got everything right. This 'ere pinch is a frame-up. Dugan wouldn't let my girl stay in the prison for long. He's shakin' her down for his own ends, lad. He's seen her with you."

Vilos drew the revolver from his coat-pocket. He twirled the barrel.

"The Gipsy gave me this, or I took it from her," he said. "It isn't loaded. If it had been, I'd of killed both of those fly-muggs."

Cragen frowned as he stared at the little gun.

"Good thing for you the gat wasn't loaded," he said. "We can beat this case with the help of Abe Simpson. We couldn't have done anything if you had croaked those two dicks. Don't do any shootin' in this city, boy. Only amateurs carry smoke-wagons."

"It's the Gipsy's," said Vilos.

"Then I'll take care of it. You turn in and 'kip' for an hour or two. Then get to Abe Simpson's and tell him I sent you."

Vilos handed Cragen the gun. He turned down the gas, removed his coat and shoes, and threw himself across a lounge. He kipped, as Cragen called it, by staring at a dim ceiling and listening to the deep breathing of the old thief, who had instantly gone to sleep.

Vilos swung his legs from off the lounge at daybreak and sat upright. He glanced at Cragen, who had not moved. He bathed his burning forehead and dressed in the bath-room. He went to the kitchen and boiled some coffee, lighted a cigarette from the gas; then hurried down-stairs and took a car.

Simpson's office, according to the telephone directory, was around the corner from the prison. Vilos passed the rearing walls and grated exterior of the city's bastile, and sought for Simpson's number. He crossed the street and entered a dingy hallway. He climbed upward through a gloom of gas-flared shadows.

A group of somber-looking men crowded the second landing. They were excitedly discussing a score of police cases. Vilos went by them and mounted a second flight of stairs. He came face to face with a wide door over which was the sign:

ABRAHAM SIMPSON

Attorney-at-Law

A few dejected women stood before this door as if it were the gate to heaven. Two girls crouched at one side of the landing. These had reptilian eyes and dangling purses. They talked in whispers to a trio of loose-lipped youths whose clothes were loud and cheap.

Vilos hesitated and stared at the sign a second time. He wondered if Simpson was in. He swung his glance to the women. He heard other steps on the second stairway.

The appearance of a bluecoat in that gathering would have caused a stampede. Thief and rogue and shoddy crime were stamped on every face.

Suddenly a head was thrust through the doorway. A pair of gimletlike black eyes swept the landing. They centered upon Vilos, who showed the most prosperity.

"You're next," the voice said as a soiled hand beckoned inside.

Vilos heard a woman wail: "My Micky gets five years—he gets five years!" as he brushed by a figure coming out from Simpson's.

He stepped in briskly. He came to a low wooden railing beyond which was a large, flat desk.

The man who sat at the desk would have commanded attention in any gathering. A polished bald dome was strengthened by a hooked nose, a firm mouth, and an outthrust chin.

"Simpson?" asked Vilos.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"To see you a minute." Vilos swung the top bar of the wooden railing and advanced to the desk. He removed his hat and laid it down on a chair. "Cragen sent me," he said in a whisper.

Simpson furrowed his brow. "James Cragen?" he asked, darting a shrewd glance at Vilos. "*The* James Cragen?"

"Yes. His daughter, Gipsy, was taken to jail last night. I want you to spring her right away."

"And who are you?"

"A friend of hers."

Simpson glanced at Vilos's right hand. He moistened his lips and leaned back in his chair. He thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his soiled vest, across which ran a heavy gold chain.

"Who pinched her?" he asked.

"Cassady and Crimm," said Vilos.

"When?"

"About three o'clock this morning."

"What money can you raise?"

Vilos hesitated before he answered the lawyer. There had been no question asked by Simpson concerning the Gipsy's charge. He wondered if the lawyer knew of the case and was already familiar with the situation.

"Two hundred," Vilos said.

The lawyer dropped his hands to his lap. He leaned forward. He lifted a pen and started writing upon a printed paper, which was evidently a brief or a copy of a bench warrant.

Suddenly he glanced at Vilos. The pen poised. He dropped it and reached for a waste-basket which was under the desk. He lifted this and brought it down with a slam.

"Look inside," he said cuttingly. "There is my morning fees. There's retainers and bail-bonds and collat! You know what collat means? Now, you come across like a regular guy, and I'll put the Gipsy on the sidewalk at three this afternoon. I want at least a thousand. One grand for a prison case!"

Vilos studied the contents of the waste-basket. It was half-filled with pocket-books, checks, rolls of paper money—one of which had a fifty-dollar wrapper—chatelaine bags, a revolver, and a sable stole with gold chain and buckles.

"All in a day's fees," said Simpson, lifting the basket and replacing it between his feet. "Now, do you want the girl out of jail or not?"

"I've got four hundred dollars with me," said Vilos. "You can phone Cragen and inquire about the rest. He's good."

"Give me the four hundred," said Simpson. "That's a retainer. I'll call up Cragen and get his promise to make good the other six hundred. You'll see the daughter out at three, as I promised."

"On the sidewalk?" asked Vilos.

"On the sidewalk. Good-by!"

Vilos handed four one-hundred dollar bills to the lawyer. He turned and strode from the room and down the stairs. He burst to the street and stared upward at the frowning façade of the jail. Somewhere behind the grated bars the Gipsy stood with her white face pressed to the sunlight which streamed over the housetops of the city.

He paused on a corner, glanced around, then went to the main entrance of the jail.

A guard peered out at him. "Well?"

"I'd like to see Miss Gipsy Cragen."

"Visitors for the ladies come between two and three," the guard said. "Sorry, young fellow."

"Is she—registered here?"

The guard swung his keys and went to a desk. He consulted a man who wore a green shade over his eyes. He came back and stared at Vilos through the bars.

"She's here all right," he said. "Held on receipt of orders from police headquarters. It's a Jane Doe warrant."

Vilos glanced at his watch. He crossed the street and entered a saloon frequented by detectives and jail-runners. He ordered a rye whisky and ginger-ale. He turned after paying the bartender.

Sweeney, off duty, was in the doorway.

"Hello!" said the detective. "Hello, Holbrook. Hear they got your girl."

Vilos stepped to one side, crammed his hands into his pockets, lowered his head slightly, and squeezed past the tall headquarters man.

He started eastward, intending to walk to Cragen's flat. The streets rang with the roar of traffic. Shop people and clerks paraded the pavements over their noon hour. The honk of the auto horns clanged in his ears. He went on with head down and his thoughts on the jail and its prisoner.

The arrest of the morning had been the first intimation of the presence of the long arm of the law. Its reaching fingers were in the air. He stopped and glanced back. No one was following him; no shadow crossed his path.

He felt the weight of something pressing upon his temples. Mike Dugan had shown his power in the matter of the Gipsy's arrest. The question that haunted Vilos was whether the boss would tip the entire affair off to the police. The Duchess and the major might be dragged into the trap. They might all do time.

Gripped by the unknown, he stopped twice on his way to Flannagan's Flats, and drank more than an ordinary portion of whisky at each saloon. The liquor surged through him with a final warmth which was long coming. His head went up. His stride became normal. He faced the world and the faces of the pedestrians with bold glancing.

Reaching Harmine Street, he turned into the tenement and climbed the stairs. Cragen was sitting near the stove in the kitchen.

The old safe-blower hitched one leg over the other. He held out his cord-wrapped pipe.

"Simpson phoned," he said. "How soon is he going to get my girl out of jail?"

"He said he would have her out on the sidewalk at three o'clock. Can he do that? Is he that powerful?"

The yegg leaned back. He replaced his pipe between his strong lips. He dragged on it.

"That goes, if Simpson said it!" he declared between puffs. "That is a sure thing. Simpson is the swellest mouthpiece in this town. He's sprung more people than any one else in the business. It's a business!"

Vilos remembered the waste-basket filled with swag, loot, and plunder. He stared at Cragen.

Suddenly the old thief straightened in his chair. He tapped his pipe on one corner of the stove.

"We've got to get Dugan!" he growled. "Dugan and I split from now on. He's been hounding my girl too long. She won't have anything to do with him. I don't blame her. There's a lot of difference between going out and taking chances with the police and selling your soul. Her soul is her own."

Vilos nodded.

"She's 'way above Dugan!" he declared. "The boss isn't fit to polish her shoes. I'll get him if you don't."

"Yes, boy, one of us should croak him. He and I split. He and I are going to naturally come together. You wouldn't think it, but we've turned many a heavy job. What I mean by a heavy job is safe and bank work."

"You and the boss?"

"Yes. I know enough to hang him. He knows enough about me to send me away for life and twenty years. That ain't it. It's blows that 'll settle the matter. He ain't goin' to run my daughter in every time she gets out of his way. It ain't natural for a father to stand for a thing like that."

Vilos crossed the kitchen to a window which overlooked the back yard of Flannagan's Flats.

He stared out and down toward the roof of Old Vic's shed.

Cragen leaned sidewise and squinted at a little alarm-clock that ticked upon a shelf over the sink.

He eyed Vilos. "Near three," he said. "I hope there won't be any slip-up."

Vilos drew out his watch. He thrust it back in his vest and paced the floor. Now and then he parted the soiled curtains and studied the wilderness of clothes-lines and ash-barrels and crisscrossed fences over which lean cats crawled.

It was almost four when a swift step was heard on the landing. Vilos hurried toward the hall. He unlocked the door. The Gipsy stood waiting to enter the flat.

"Ah!" said Cragen, rising from his chair. "So you're back?"

The Gipsy glanced at Vilos and then at her father. She pressed her hands to her cheek. She breathed upon her fingers.

"Everything fine," she said, reaching out her hands and holding them over the stove. "Bail came at three. Simpson arranged it. It's only five thousand. I don't know who signed the bond."

"We'll never need to know," said Cragen. "Get off your things, girl, and tell us about it. Did you hear who turned you up?"

"Dugan," said the Gipsy as she glanced at Vilos. "Why, those two detectives who took me to the jail as much as admitted it! They were sorry about the whole matter. They said the police haven't a thing on me."

"And what did you say?" asked Cragen craftily. "Did you say anything?"

"I did not. Do you think I'd talk to those kind of people? Why, they struck Vilos and knocked him into the street!"

Vilos nodded.

"Crimm and Cassady," he said, "are Dugan's tools. I don't believe Sweeney would mix up in the thing."

"Ah, they're all bad!" grunted Cragen with a world of hate in his voice. "They're out to shake us down, and when we can't come across with hush-money they're going to frame us up."

Vilos helped the Gipsy off with her tan coat. He took her hat after she had removed it from her head and thrust through the crown as many as five hatpins. He carried the hat and coat to nails in the hallway, where he hung them up. He returned and shook the fire and placed fresh coal upon the embers. He set the draft at the back of the rusty pipe.

Cragen turned from the sink with a kettle of water. Vilos took it and lifted a stove-lid. He glanced around as he set the kettle over the opening.

"Let's eat," he said. "I'll go downstairs and get some wine. We haven't eaten anything since this morning."

"I had coffee, pie, and rolls," said the Gipsy. "That's what they sell in the jail. My, but they were stale!"

Vilos heard Cragen giving orders concerning the coming supper, as he pulled down his hat and started for the wine. He sniffed the cool night air and glanced up and down Harmine Street.

He went along the sidewalk and rounded the corner of the block. The bartender peered out of the slidelike opening.

"There was a friend of yours in here," he said huskily. "He's gone now. Just went."

"Who?" asked Vilos.

"The boss—Dugan!"

Vilos opened the door between the bar and the back room. He stepped through to the bartender's side.

"Which way did he go?" he asked.

"Went toward the flats. I thought he saw you come in. He beat it right afterward."

Forgetting the wine, Vilos rushed across the barroom and plunged out the swinging doors. The street was almost deserted. He pulled down his hat and sprinted as fast as he was able toward the tenement. He was too late.

A roar cleft through the street. A snarled bundle of fighting hate bounced from the steps and rolled into the gutter of Harmine Street. Two men rose, swayed, and jabbed viciously. They separated and exchanged blows at a distance. They charged and locked. They were now fighting furiously.

They went down as the Gipsy, bareheaded and round-eyed, appeared at the doorway of the tenement. She clutched the broken rail and leaned forward. She cried to her father.

Italians and curious-faced children held a respectable distance. A policeman's locust echoed down through the dark cañon. Vilos edged around the two men. He watched for a chance to separate them. He hesitated to strike at Dugan, for fear of hitting Cragen. He heard the Gipsy's poignant call. He backed to the sidewalk and turned toward the steps.

"Let them fight!" she said. "Father is the better man!"

And so it proved.

Dugan lay prone as the old thief climbed to his knees, swayed, bunched his fist, and glared about with a berserker's fire in his eyes as he got up and walked toward the sidewalk.

The boss moaned. The moans changed to lurid curses. A head lifted above the curbstone; he got up slowly and seemingly with great pain, then the bulkish body crawled grotesquely away.

It wormed and squirmed as far as the corner saloon. Blood was on the slaty stones. A trail of crimson marked the way into the front room of Connor's. Vilos clutched Cragen's knotted wrist. It was like a bar of iron.

"Come on up-stairs," he said. "We haven't heard the last of this."

Cragen spat out a yellow tooth.

"I licked him!" he said grimly.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

The Silent Pool

by George Gilbert

THOSE readers who remember Herman Howard Matteson's story, "The Limping Tiger," in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for March 29, 1919, will find that in some respects it and this story of Mr. Gilbert's are alike. In this connection an extract from a letter from Mr. Gilbert that accompanied the manuscript of "The Silent Pool," may be of interest:

"In your March 29 ALL-STORY WEEKLY there is a story, 'The Limping Tiger,' by Herman Howard Matteson, and a darned fine story, too. The germ-plot of 'The Limping Tiger' and 'The Silent Pool' are very alike; the texture of the stories absolutely different. There is not a possibility that Matteson ever saw or heard of my story, or that I saw or heard of his while I was writing mine. The two stories form a curious study in duality of thought."

Mr. Gilbert's contention is, of course, correct. Both his and Mr. Matteson's high professional standing, and the dates upon which the stories in question were sent to us make it certain that the cause of the resemblance in the stories is merely a case of two writers hitting upon the same fundamental plot idea. And each story was so good that in justice to our readers we could not refrain from publishing it.

HAVING for his father one Chandra Das, a money lender of the leather-workers' quarter and for his mother, a white woman who had sunk so low as to live with the money lender for what cheap opium he would provide, Chandra Das, the second, could not be expected to be of the highest rank as a moralist. And he was not. His creed, if indeed it could be called creed, was simple:

"Keep all you have, get all you can."

The money lender dying just as he had completed the amassing of the goodly part of the lakh of rupees he desired and the white woman succumbing to the fumes for which she craved, Chandra Das lost no time in forcing all his inherited debtors to pay, with usury, and then he left the quarter of the leather workers and became a showy, softly but firmly grasping banker and money lender to any and all with whom he could do business.

An Eurasian, he scoffed at everything his father had believed in and held to nothing his mother had held to. He did not smoke opium because it was bad for business. He was outside of caste lines and stuck his tongue in his fat cheek when such were mentioned. But he did this on the side opposite to the talker; on the other he kept a grave face and listened

with one ear attentive to native superstitions.

Chandra Das was gross in person, dressed in European style, talked big of loyalty to the empire, was noisy at certain cheap clubs where his money procured him admission to the society of certain leeches whose glib chat of the equality of man and the need for more native talent in the civil service failed to deceive Chandra Das, who knew that sort of talk was folly from such as they were. But membership in such clubs helped his business, not with the ruling race, but by giving him prestige with the natives. When he remarked: "As I was saying to the Deputy Surveyor of the Jagpoore District at the Empire Club yesterday," even his most stubborn debt-serfs, like the brothers Chutrum, timber contractors to the railroads, feared; for what might not a man who spoke thus familiarly to white officials be able to do to any person who would have the temerity to cross him?

Kindly white officials told fear-ridden natives plainly not to heed Chandra Das's hints, when they asked about him. But only a few asked. And to mark more strongly his identity with the ruling race, Chandra Das had laid out in the garden of his house in the environs of Nazimbad a bathing pool beside a little pavilion wherein Chandra Das could make ready for his bath at his ease and to which he could retire to be properly clothed, after being rubbed dry by some of his many, many servants. Thus Chandra Das was able to talk of his "cold plunge" to the leeches of the Empire Club, whereas the natives looked upon him with awe, as one who deliberately bathed himself in cold water, as did the people who were of the ruling race.

The bathing pool of Chandra Das was made of white tiles, cunningly cemented together in the shape of a giant bowl and the outlet was a narrow ditch, lined with coarse bricks, that led the wasted water out under the wall to join with the thousand and one other causes of offense to the nostrils, and of sustenance to the billions of tiny organisms that made the death rate so high in Nazimbad that upon occasion special commissions were named to look into the matter and make the necessary report.

There were many other things in the garden of Chandra Das beside the bathing pool and the pavilion, such as a mongoose that lived in the wall and saw to it that no cobra abode in the garden, a saucy mynah bird that came out of the trees to hunt for food among the flowers, and many other things, unimportant to this story. And the pool, except when Chandra Das used it, was silent and no one dared go near it, for fear its water, pumped into it daily from a deep well and led to it through bamboo pipes, would be contaminated. Save for the work that was necessary each day, the beautiful garden was empty, except for the bees, the mongoose, the mynah bird, and other small forms of winged, feathered or furred life, for Chandra Das would have it so. He had no wife, no children; only his money and his position. By lending here and there judiciously, Chandra Das in due time came to be looked upon as a person of some importance to even a certain class of white people.

The little mongoose that lived in the garden wall knew nothing of the greatness of Chandra Das, being always busy with his own affairs and fearful lest a cobra come under the wall, where the water trickled out, and not be killed before he, Nag, had slain some one of those beings whom all mongooses must guard. To him Chandra Das was no more than any of the other men, high or low, about the place. And so it was, that, hastening to his chink in the wall, after a scurry about the garden, the mongoose ran right under the uplifted right foot of Chandra Das, as that great man was about to step from his pavilion to the pool and the foot of Chandra Das trod on the foot of the mongoose, hurting it and the flashing white teeth of the mongoose drew blood from the great toe of Chandra Das ere the swift animal ran away to hide himself in his chink in the garden wall.

If Chandra Das believed not in the gods of his father and his mother, he was able to use the profane words of both races.

Now poured forth imprecations upon the mongoose, upon the gardeners for permitting the mongoose to remain in the wall, upon the foolish notions that people held that a mongoose would keep off serpents. And all the while his great toe was bleeding as he hopped about like a fat ogre and cursed like a *yak*.

"At once, Lal Beg," he stormed, to his body servant, a tall, lean, bearded, turbaned Mohammedan who had been with him a scant year, but a long time for Chandra Das to retain a really first class servant, "get that jar of ointment that is on the teakwood table in the house, and put some of the salve on my toe."

Lal Beg did not stir to obey, but said:

"That is for some one else to do; your worthiness knows that in that ointment, as you have told me, is pig fat—and I may not touch it and be a clean man. The pain is great and has made you forget or you would not have wounded my honor by even mentioning such a service to me."

"Huruu-u-u-u-u! Some one get me the pot of ointment, as this son of ten thousand pigs will not. Hey! Hee-eye!"

Pra Daesal, the smart Eurasian lad who coveted Lal Beg's place, darted for the house and soon returned. Lal Beg, proud, aloof, stood with folded arms while the toe was annointed, wrapped in a bit of soft cloth. Chandra Das had taken keen interest in this operation, bending over, dabbing his fingers into the ointment, making idle, cutting remarks about Lal Beg and his Mohammedan superstitions the while.

Now that the hurt was bandaged, Lal Beg stepped toward him. Chandra Das suddenly reached forward and with one ointment-greased finger made a mark of shame on the dusky cheek of Lal Beg, crying:

"Get you gone, lazy one; those who will not serve must starve."

For one instant Chandra Das stood near to death then, as Lal Beg towered over him with face impassive, but with hand clutching a knife that was in his robes. Then, his face still smooth, Lal Beg passed out, not even stopping to take the balance of wages due him.

And Chandra Das placed Pra Daesel in Lal Beg's room and after being duly invested with his clothing, took a stick and went to the hole in the wall and slew the mongoose and went forth, limping but eager for money as ever.

Lal Beg had a numerous family; first his wife and their man child living in the tiny house up the dry *nullah* running from the western wall of Nazimbad and whom his duties did not permit him to see often. Then he had brothers and an old mother who lived with one of his sisters who was married, and numerous uncles and aunts and cousins.

He did not fear for himself, but for his family. And so he kept the anger over the stain on his honor to himself, lest anything happen to Chandra Das and he, Lal Beg, be blamed and the whole family come under the heavy hand of the law. For the position of Chandra Das was such that anything done against him had to be done in secret.

As for Chandra Das, he went each day to his business and his bath and prospered all the more. Only he would let no other mongoose come back to live in the wall.

"Thus it must be," Lal Beg whispered through his beard to his wife, "he must die, but no trace must remain. Only by my smile must men know that the wound to my honor is healed. But how?"

And he was careful not to go near the garden or house of Chandra Das, for he knew that although the great man thought not of him, yet the servants did; some from fear, some from hate, some from love, and the desire to see him avenged.

The heat of the summer was great, the rains long delayed. Dust devils danced on every bit of bare ground when the wind stirred and the heat waves caused tall objects to waver before the vision as if they were of quicksilver.

At the height of the heat, Lal Beg made a curious purchase—a closely knit, finely knit net—for fishing, while he rested, so he said. Also a clean, strong, large bag, that had held beans in the bazaar. And then he disappeared. The net was large, strong, but took up little space, folded.

If Chandra Das had been watchful he would have had a man follow Lal Beg to the river bank above Nazimbad—or the bank of what the drought had left of the river. For there, making of his netting a neat trap, he placed it over the hole by which a huge python entered or came out there and when the immense serpent glided forth, it was entangled in the net and the net, lifted bravely by Lal Beg with a long pole, inserted in the big bean bag and the serpent, then harmless, was carried, by night, to the home of Lal Beg and thrust into a corner of an unused room.

And now the heat grew and the air became ever dryer and more irksome and seemed to burn like a blast from a furnace ten times heated. And the great python, enmeshed in net and bag, accustomed until then to plenty of water, was suffering from a thirst that was akin to fury. Never had she been a hundred paces from water before then. And now—

"I think the rains will be here soon; even now there are clouds and the sun does not shine to show the bottom of the pool, as usual," Chandra Das, softly oracular, said, stepping toward the pool one morning at the very crest of the drought.

"What has, then, made wet spots on the curb of the pool?" asked Pra Daesel, pointing to places where it seemed that a giant wet rope had been dragged across the tiles edging the pool.

"Some careless servant has spilled water; have him sent away, if found," and Chandra Das wriggled from his last robe and appeared. Like a temple walking demon, he stepped down from the pedestal of his shrine. He placed his great toe, that the mongoose had nipped, in the water, wriggled it deliciously, stepped into the pool, it being shallow at one end, advanced toward the center with pleasure showing on his face, reached the spot where it was deep enough to permit him to immerse completely—when over his fat face there spread the mask of fear—horrible, gripping, mastering. His features became suffused with blood, then turned black, his eyes started from his head, his tongue, frozen with terror, protruded from his blackening lips. Then, gaining voice, shriek upon shriek he emitted—and sank into the depths of the horribly agitated pool. And then silence!

The servants, turning, ran, screaming, beating their breasts. It was an hour before order was restored and the gross body recovered. When found, it seemed as if it had been corded about with huge cables that had crushed it in here and there; bulged it out at other places. And there was so much water splashed about that no one noticed that a track, as if a rope, wet, had been dragged over the pool's curb at one point, turned into the drain that took the pool's overflow out under the wall—where *no* mongoose was to see that no serpents entered the garden.

And the body was buried in a cemetery, European style, and Chandra Das's money went to his distant relatives and they quarreled over it and sold his business to another lender of money, who did not keep the house where the pool was. Owing to the tragedy the house went vacant and soon, as houses will there that are not tenanted, it began to go to pieces and the garden became wild and another mongoose dwelt in the wall and kept the cobras and other harmful serpents out; the mynahs scolded in the trees, as ever; the moths came to the flowers at night when the moon was high and gazed down into the pool all silent and lonely.

And because he asked for the place and was not afraid, he said, of the demon that dwelt in the pool, Lal Beg was made keeper of the house and garden of the dead Chandra Das, dwelling in the gardener's lodge near the wall with his wife and their little son. But he did no work as a gardener, that being for others to do.

Once Pra Daesel came to call on him, at the edge of an evening, and found Lal Beg sitting on the pool's rim, gazing down into the water. He had taken service with Chandra Das's successor in business.

"I had thought, Lal Beg," he said glibly, "that when Chandra Das befouled you with that ointment, you had struck him down."

"You see I did not," Lal Beg answered softly, "and yet he came to a terrible end."

"Yes, and lucky for you that you did not strike him down then and plead in the

court that he had offended your honor on religious grounds. For there was no pig fat in the ointment. The old ointment became rancid and I cleansed the jar and filled it with vegetable oils without telling of it. You made a mistake in hastily refusing to use the ointment—and I got your place," laughing evilly.

Lal Beg was silent for a space, then:

"It was the same; he dishonored me. He meant to and the meaning was dishonorable to him and to me. But I did well to withhold my hand for"—waving his hand toward the water—"you see the black judgment overtook him even out of the depths of this silent pool. Allah is great!"

He stroked his great beard. Pra Daesel, shuddering, went out, leaving the Mohammedan sitting, drabbling his sinewy right hand in the waters of the silent, useless pool.

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BALLADE OF PERFUMES

BY RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

HAUNTING the air float perfumes of all time,
Fantoms of nard anointing unknown kings,
Ghosts of the incense circling orient clime,
Wraiths of the myrrh that clouded Nike's wings.
Cinnamon, aloes, champak—spicy things
Strange to the nostrils freight each sunny ray:
To me more pregnant is the storm that brings
The tang and tingle of the clean salt spray.

Jinn of the East, pervade our smoke and grime,
Heavy with musk that wreathed the tombs of Mings,
Flaunting about our street of nauseous slime
Sandalwood, jinko's sacred offerings,
Swooning patchouli, fragrancy that clings—
Seeking to drug our senses to their sway:
To me more potent is the spume that flings
The tang and tingle of the clean salt spray.

Jasmine and rose have long been held sublime;
Odorous rapture high in the orchid swings;
Out of exotic petal, leaf, and cyme,
Lovely, alive, the clever pander wrings
Attars to tempt all vain soft overlings—
Essenced delight for all with purse to pay:
To me all-priceless is the brine that stings,
The tang and tingle of the clean salt spray.

ENVOY.

Flora, although your wood and meadow springs
Ravish and witch when flowered fresh by May,
How brief their spell: forever Triton sings
The tang and tingle of the clean salt spray.

Surrender of Martha

by Earl G. Curtis

Author of "Brothers to Trouble," "Sarah Worth's Feud," "The Man in the Chair," etc.

CHAPTER I.

MARTHA NEWCOMB.

As if the site had been chosen by one who sought solitude, the cabin perched securely upon a miniature plateau indented by nature into the rocky hillside, coldly aloof from the trail that snaked through the wilderness of the mountains until, in the foot-hills below, it attained the dignity of a road that reached down to the levels of the valley.

Of rough-hewn logs, beaten into uneven smoothness by the weather of nigh a century, was the Spartan-like habitation of three rooms and lean-to kitchen. Not unproudly, it displayed to its inconsiderable portion of the world a tiny porch with sharply sloping roof.

This was the home of Saul Howell, whose run of moonshine was looked upon with thirsty favor by the denizens of Powdertown, the town of lawless uncompleteness, which war had hurled into the hitherto peaceful valley below.

The gentle sun of the late afternoon lay like a benediction upon the face of the venerable woman who sat upon the porch, smoking. Gran'mammy Howell was blind, and the sunshine meant only outdoor warmth in the twilight of her life; sufficient for her the blackened clay and the droning to herself of the disordered thoughts of her second childhood. Her seamed, leathery features were as weather-worn as the logs of the cabin. And why should not this be? The difference in years in the creation of the two could be counted upon the curling fingers of the toil-torn hands of her.

From the porch step a path fell in reckless abandon down the steep hill, broadening a bit, then spending itself at a spring that bubbled near the roots of a mammoth oak which reared itself very close to the rock-littered trail. From the trail's lower edge there dropped a thickly wooded, shallow valley that, perhaps a mile across, swept upward to another ridge of the Cumberlands, even more sparsely settled than the shoulder which the trail made habitable.

From the cabin a girl stepped listlessly to the porch. Her comely face was the clouded mirror of a mind sorely troubled; the forehead above the patient eyes was scored with furrows of the flesh—furrows for which time was blameless.

Before her advent into this vale of vicissitude the sire of Martha Newcomb, the last male of his family, had died a death that made an end to a mountain feud, and with the birth of the girl the mother had passed to that tranquil peace denied her in life.

Gran'mammy Howell, even then an old woman, though sturdy, had in the goodness of her golden heart taken the infant as her own, and, together, Martha and Saul had, in her watchful care, attained womanhood and manhood.

With a tender glance to assure herself that gran'mammy rested comfortably, the girl shaded her eyes from the glow of the sun and looked long toward the opposite ridge where Saul, with the assistance of the

Snead brothers, operated his still on Bear-cub Run.

The amazing outbreak of Powdertown—it scarcely could be called a growth—had brought to the front yard of the "natives" a profitable market for their illicit liquor. Husky wanderers, men, and women, too, of easy morals, had flocked to the city of magic from every cranny of the country, and most of them owned padded throats that strong liquor only could tickle.

A quarter-mile down Saul emerged from the brush that dressed the valley side of the trail, and, even at the distance, Martha saw that he approached with steps that were unsteady. Her lips tightened, and she watched him with visible resentment, a gleam of pain in her black eyes. This was the man she had thought to marry.

Between Saul and her *that* had always been well understood, and until of late Martha had been passively content with the promise of a future with him. She was by no means demonstrative. But since the war had given birth to Powdertown, the young fellow had become engrossed in his illicit venture—to the utter neglect of the girl.

Once she had pleaded earnestly, asking Saul to give up the still before the law enmeshed him, but the taint of easy money lured the reckless youngster on, although now he had arrived at a point where liberal portions of his own white liquor was necessary to drown the thoughts of possible disaster.

He stopped at the spring and drank greedily, then with uncertain gravity tackled the ascent to the cabin. Still with no movement, Martha waited until he gained the porch. Lean and tall, he towered over her, his generously featured face, not unhandsome normally, flushed repulsively. With grinning carelessness he stood his rifle against the railing and tossed his dust-caked hat through the door. Swaying, he tried to gather her in his arms, but Martha evaded the clumsy advance.

"Saul—Saul!" she said despairingly.

"Hain't you glad to see me, gal?"

"Not like thet, Saul—not like thet!"

His whisky-bleared eyes narrowed.

"Hain't I good 'nough fer to hug you?"

"Not when you air like thet," Martha repeated scornfully.

"Aw," he leered, "cain't a body take a couple o' drinks? Good likker cain't hurt a man, an' thet's the kind whut Saul Howell runs. Look here." He brought to her sight a large roll of bills, much more money than Martha Newcomb had ever seen. "Look whut good ole moonshine has broughten to us. Gal, I got 'nough money to speak 'bout somethin' thet's been on my mind a longish time now."

Sensing what was coming, Martha turned away.

"Me an' you — thet is — we — al'ays aimed fer to git married. Hain't thet so, Martha?" His tongue was loose, difficult to control.

"Yes," tonelessly.

"Then, ef you say so, to-morrer's the day, gal!" Saul exclaimed in grinning hilarity. "I jes' been waitin' to git a whole lot o' money in a pile—to git the money comin' in reg'lar from the still—an' now I'm astin' ef you air ready. Will you say the word, Martha gal?"

"I cain't, Saul."

"You cain't?" There was startled disappointment in his husky voice. "You mean thet you hain't ready yit?"

"I hain't ready—yit."

"An' why hain't you?"

"Saul—I hain't ready—an' I nuver will be ready till you quit runnin' thet dratted still!"

"Me—quit runnin' the still? Hain't I already said I hain't a goin' fer to quit?"

Martha did not answer.

"Don' you love me, Martha?"

"I did, Saul, 'fore you took thet still over on Bearcub. Now you don' nuver hev time to take notice o' me, an'—an'—I don' know."

"I haint' been meanin' to overlook you, Martha. But a man's got to tend to his bus'ness — 'speshully when he's runnin' white likker. 'Em revenooers is al'ays snoopin' round in the hills o' late."

"Thet's whut I tell you, Saul!" the girl exclaimed, eyes snapping, body tense. "That's whut I cain't make you see! Ef we was to git married as things air, we'd nuver hev no happiness nor peace o' mind.

"Calamity dangles over you day *an'* night. Hit's almighty bad as 'tis—me worryin' over you—but ef you was my husband hit ud be worse. Cain't you see, man? Hit ud be hell on airth!"

"I kin see, all right," Saul replied shortly. "I kin see thet you don' want to marry me."

"I do, Saul," Martha told him quietly. "But ef I was to marry you now I'd be marryin' thet still. An' I hain't a goin' to do *thet!* You wouldn' hev no time fer a wife, an' ef I *got* to be unhappy—then I want to be unhappy all by myself. Saul, I want thet you should give hit up!"

"I hain't!" he angrily declared.

"Then we won't marry."

"Do you really mean hit?" Saul asked incredulously. "Do you really mean thet I got to choose 'tween you an' my still?"

"You got to do jes' thet."

Saul glowered at her a full minute; then, raging, he stamped into the cabin with such a noise that Gran'mammy Howell began a long discourse.

"By God, I choose!" he flung back at the girl. "I choose—an' hit hain't no mule-haided gal!"

CHAPTER II.

GYP JASPER STARTS A GAME.

THE following afternoon a stranger appeared on the trail below the Howell cabin. He scrutinized his surroundings until apparently satisfied that he saw his journey's end, then dismounted and secured his horse beneath the oak near the spring. With a delicate-colored handkerchief he flickered a light coat of dust from his broad-brimmed hat of pearl-gray, and rubbed his shoes until he could glimpse in the gleam of them his handsome, predatory features.

He clambered up the path, and Martha, inside the house, heard him out on the porch patiently endeavoring to make known his desires to Gran'mammy Howell. That task was quite hopeless, and the girl at once went to him.

At the sight of her, sweet and virile as the air of the wooded hills, the man, staring in wide-eyed admiration, threw back his shoulders and paraded his masculine charms—an act as wholly instinctive as with any peacock.

"I'm 'Gpy' Jasper, of Powdertown," he smilingly announced. "Isn't this Saul Howell's place?"

Martha admitted that it was.

"I rode up to see Saul on business," Jasper continued, still displaying his faultless teeth. "Isn't he home yet?"

"He hain't come as yit," Martha politely answered, "but I'm lookin' fer him any time now." She stepped into the cabin and came out with a cane-bottomed chair. "Won't you set an' wait fer him?"

Jasper suavely thanked her and seated himself.

"What's wrong with the old lady?" he asked, nodding toward Gran'mammy Howell. "Can't she talk?"

"Nonsense. She's blind—an' ole," Martha said softly.

"That's too bad," the man sympathized carelessly. Then impudently, half-jokingly: "Suppose *you* sit and keep me company."

Martha stared.

"I cain't," she finally told him in a matter-of-fact manner. "I got to git Saul's supper."

And she left him there.

Saul arrived soon after, bringing with him the grouch he had taken away that morning. He did not appear surprised to find the stranger there—evidently he expected the man. Their business must have been rather important, for supper was ready a full half-hour before they ended their low-toned conversation. The truth was that Jasper was Howell's most important customer, and there was a matter of price to be agreed upon for future deliveries of the white fire-water.

The sport from Powdertown had not intended to stay for the evening meal, but, nevertheless, he avidly snapped at the invitation which Saul extended with diffidence. Gyp was not at all averse to another sight of the unsophisticated maid.

Together the men entered the kitchen, where the table was set and waiting, and Martha could not help but compare the

two. Gyp was as tall, if not taller than Saul. Slender of hips and wide of shoulder, he moved with the acquired grace of a dancing master, while Saul merely clumped across the floor. And the mountaineer's faded shirt and rusty boots were in dismal contrast with the top-to-toe elegance of Jasper.

As he ate, the guest found himself strongly attracted by the girl—to him she was a new type of woman. She served them silently, then took her place at the table, apparently oblivious to the smart chatter of the visitor; but Gyp had heard the music of her drawling voice, and, later, when he headed his horse toward the valley, he swore to the night that a man might go far and do worse than see this girl again. And then and there he promised himself that he *would* see her again.

And he did—the very next day. It was just before noon when Martha, sitting upon the porch near gran'mammy, espied him riding up the trail, and she idly wondered why he had come again so soon.

She answered his questions civilly, if not graciously, informing him that Saul was away. Thereupon Jasper explained, a little too carefully, that he did not desire to see Howell particularly. He rode a great deal for exercise, and was liable to come up as far as the cabin almost any time. He casually inquired after the old lady, gracefully lifted his hat, and cantered away. His stay was ridiculously short, considering the miles that stretched between the cabin and the powder city.

The trail came to know well indeed the imprint of the hoofs of Jasper's horse. Again and again in the days that passed Martha found the man upon the tiny porch, and as time went on the length of these little visits grew longer. The fellow was always smilingly debonair, and the girl, if not recognizing him as a friend, at least became at ease in his presence. It is scarcely necessary to mention that he took care never to approach the cabin except when Howell should be working over on Bearcub Run.

Since the afternoon he had talked with Jasper, Saul had given more and more time to the still, and he ignored—utterly—the existence of Martha. And she, as silently proud as he when the two were together, saw no reason to tell him of the frequent calls of Gyp.

Came the day when Jasper glimpsed that which he had watched for—the first gleam of friendship in the eyes of Martha.

"Howell anywhere around?" he inquired easily, certain that he was not.

"No—an' I hain't 'spectin' him anyways soon," Martha answered. "Not till hit's mos' dark."

"Good!" Gyp ejaculated, showering upon her his most charming smile. "Today we can have a long, long talk."

"I—I don't think we kin," she told him hesitatingly. "I'm skeered Saul won't like you—anybody—settin' round, ef he knowed hit."

In his previous visits Jasper had found the girl close-mouthed, indeed, in any talk pertaining to her relations with Saul, and now he set himself to angle for the information he desired.

"Does Howell own you?" he carelessly inquired, and waited keenly for the answer.

"He don', I reckon."

"Are you married to him?" Jasper pressed.

Martha flushed like a crimson dawn.

"We air promised," she said.

"There's many a slip between a promise and a ceremony," he laughingly commented. "There can't be any harm for us to talk, can there?"

"I reckon not," Martha answered painfully.

She scarcely knew what to say. Something warned her that it was not well that this man came so often to her humble home, yet the inherited hospitality of the hills forbade her ordering him from the place. She had no valid reason for such action. He always acted the gentleman, and she found him and his talk interesting. In the life of Martha there had been few men—very few—none like the polished "furriner."

"I'm betting that Howell doesn't care if I talk with you," Gyp continued banteringly. "I have eyes, haven't I? During the

entire time I sat at your table the first time I came up, he didn't speak a single word to you. Evidently your affairs are not running smoothly. Eh?"

"Things hain't goin' smooth fer us," Martha soberly admitted, her resentment toward Saul pushing past the curtain of her native reserve.

"A quarrel?" he softly questioned, careful not to interfere with the flow of her thoughts.

"Yes," Martha said simply. "Saul wants me to marry him now—but I cain't till he quits runnin' thet still over on Bear-cub. I hev swore thet to myself. An' he won't quit an'—an'—we fussed."

The bold eyes of Jasper snapped his delight at the rift in the love of the two. A rift may very easily be widened into a veritable chasm.

"Oh, you'll give over to him after a little," he spoke, just the right suspicion of a taunt in his voice.

"I won't—nuver!" Martha flashed.

Gyp smiled knowingly.

"You should get yourself another sweetheart," he laughed, watching her narrowly. "Howell's life is filled with his business, and your life, which he as a lover should fill, is empty. I can't understand why you stay in all this wilderness."

"Hit's all I know," the girl wearily replied. "But sometimes — here" — she pressed a hand to her breast—"inside o' me, somethin' mos' drives me to break loose an' go 'outside' an' live—even ef I hev to pay fer the joy o' livin'. I reckon thar's wild blood in me somewhar," she added uncertainly.

She was floundering into his snare, and the man drew close to her, masterfully holding her eyes with his own. He began to talk now, as he well knew how to talk, telling the girl of life in the cities he knew, of the gay evenings, the white lights, the theaters, the handsome gowns—

With the inspired skill of a devil, he wove for her a web of enchantment, speaking only of things beautiful, and never of the ugly evil in which the life he knew was deeply rooted.

And Martha, in all her simplicity, sat entranced, living the scenes that with lying words he painted her. When Saul came home he found her still sitting there, dreaming.

CHAPTER III.

A PROPOSAL.

GYP JASPER possessed the patience of the born woman-hunter—he was of that ignoble breed. A blackguard of no little elegance, he brought into play, when with the naive Martha, all the wiles which experience had taught him in a free life that had seen much of women—of a sort.

Saul, in his drunken stubbornness, continued his unwise course of ignoring the girl. He sullenly ate of the food she prepared, and that was all. And Martha desired more—much more.

Saul, in the placid days before his unlawful venture, had, if he ever gave thought to the subject, never dreamed that the girl was capable of such depth of feeling. For that matter, neither had Martha; but since the insinuation of Jasper into her life, she gradually grew aware of its compelling, unspent force. In the privacy of her lonely moments she sometimes tried to analyze her slumbering emotions, and she now knew, with a wondering fear, that once her love was given—once the torrential force of it fused with the love of he whom fate allotted her—there was no limit to the height, or depth, to which it might bear her.

Saul's sustained mood of unspeaking neglect embittered her. The deathly monotony of the hills, coupled with his savage indifference, became each day more unbearable, and lassitude brought her to a state of mind where she cared little what happened. One hour she was drawn toward Saul by the memory of the old days, and the next hour her mind was full of Gyp, sorely tempted as she was by the glittering vista opened to her eyes by his twisted tongue.

With vague uneasiness she came to look forward to the fast-speeding hours spent with the fellow, and in her desperation she consciously began to encourage his visits, in a timid sort of unformed hope that Saul might discover them together and be

aroused into jealousy — jealousy which would open his eyes to the loss of her love.

That hope was of no avail, for Gyp was, with all his fiery ardor, a cautious individual. Saul was never long at the cabin. The hours before midnight seldom found him there, and many times dawn was at his back when he arrived. He would wolf his breakfast, throw himself for a few hours upon his bed, and immediately take himself off to Bearcub. Through Dan Snead, who ran the liquor down to Powdertown, Gyp tried to keep himself informed of Saul's movements, and nearly every afternoon found the poacher comfortably at ease at the mountaineer's cabin.

He dropped all pretense and pursued the girl ardently — wooed her openly. And it was borne to Martha, as a bitter-sweet certainty not to be evaded, that the thought of leaving Saul forever, and gran'mammy and the old home — everything she had known—and seeking solace in the love that Jasper offered was not at all distasteful.

To-day Gyp was more amorous, more forceful, than usual. The two sat near the droning old woman, and he ceased speaking only when the girl went to gran'mammy and filled and lighted her pipe. She placed it in the palsied fingers and returned to his side.

"You know I love you, don't you, Martha?"

"You hev said so," she replied unsmilingly.

"You know I do," Gyp said complacently. "Else why should I ride up here so often?"

Martha met his burning eyes steadily, not bothering to answer, and waited for him to continue.

"You're far too pretty a girl to spend your life up here in these hills. You're cheating the world—you're cheating me—and, above all other things, you're cheating yourself—"

She interrupted him rudely.

"Is hit the truth thet I'm really so purty?" she asked in the matter-of-fact manner of one who only desires to know.

"Haven't I said it?" His voice was sugary. "The chance to live is before you —to live and be care-free and joyous. Come with me, girl, out of this lonely, world-forsaken wilderness."

She slowly shook her head.

"Why won't you—what holds you?"

"I cain't leave gran'mammy."

He laughed amusedly.

"The old woman would never know you had gone."

"She *would*—she'd miss me. An'—an' —thar's Saul."

"Saul!" The man was poisonous in his contempt. "That rummy! Surely you don't love him—not now—Martha?"

"I don' know," she unsteadily replied, her brows upraised in her honest perplexity.

"That proves it, then," Gyp argued. "If you loved the fellow, surely you'd know it."

Martha lapsed into brooding silence.

"Don't you think you could be happy with me?" he continued gently. "Outside —with the whole world to wander in—I would make you happy, girl."

He placed a hand upon her own, and with the contact of flesh she sprang from her chair, her face betraying her temptation.

"Oh!" she wailed. "Don' ast me—please don' ast me agin right now!"

"I won't—not just now," Gyp assured her, rising. "Some other time—some other afternoon, perhaps."

"Mebbe — mebbe," Martha muttered, averting her face.

"It's best for me to go now, and I'm going. You're overwrought. But I'm coming back. May I?"

She nodded permission.

"And remember Gyp Jasper is your friend—always. If anything happens—if your heart turns away from this to me—come to me and you'll find me waiting."

He rode away, more than a little encouraged.

CHAPTER IV.

SENT AWAY.

THE morning was in its infancy when Martha, with laggard feet, stepped across the threshold and gratefully breathed of the lusty air. Saul had not come home. Listening for the clump of

his boots—grappling with the doubts that beset her—she had passed a well-nigh sleepless night.

She fervently hoped—the heart of her prayed—that Saul might, just this once, be sober when he left Bearcub, and come home in a mood which would let him listen to reason. Jasper had wormed himself into a commanding position that placed her back squarely against a wall invisible, and in her mind's eye she stood there, helpless, without the support of Saul. The will that had heretofore baffled the outsider was weakening.

So engrossed was she with her disquieting thoughts that he was at the spring before she espied him. With eyes that narrowed she watched his ungainly ascent of the footpath, and her head drooped in her disappointment. He gained the porch, and would have brushed by her unheeded had she not impulsively grasped his arm.

"Saul, you air drunk agin — you air drunk all o' the time, hit 'pears to me," she said, sorrow breaking her voice.

He wheeled, and she plainly saw the red-veined whites of his eyes as with conscious rudeness he jerked free of the detaining hand and shambled into the house.

"You make me 'mos' hate the sight o' you!" she shrilly cried, flushing with anger. "I wish 'em revenooers ud burn thet dratted still!"

Evidently, Saul desired no breakfast. He proceeded direct to his room and, fully clothed, dropped oxlike upon the bed, thrusting an arm across his face.

Martha was not to be denied. She, heretofore humble as any woman of the hills, was facing a fate unkind, and *would,* in spite of Saul's boorishness, have her way. With his making of moonshine, and his drinking of it, he was each day thrusting her further out of his life—further than he could possibly imagine, but, anyhow, he would listen to her this morning.

"Saul, I cain't stand this here no longer. An' I hain't got to, ef you jes' knowed hit! You air runin' yore life, man, an' hurtin' me awful, comin' home thisaway ever' day. You hev jes' got to give up thet still—or I'm a goin'!"

He muttered in a disinterested manner.

"You hear me? You hev got to quit runnin' thet hellish still! You hain't fit fer to be no woman's husband—you hain't!" Uncontrolled fury gripped her, and she unleashed her wrath. "I shore wish thet somebody ud pizen you!"

Saul could scarcely believe that he heard aright. He raised upon an elbow and stared in disbelief. Martha met his inflamed eyes with mien defiant.

"I mean hit!" she sturdily declared. "I wish thet somebody ud pizen you—you likker-lappin' hound!"

"I wouldn't keer ef somebody would," Saul growled huskily, his first words for her in days. He fell flat again and turned his back upon her. "Jes' as well be daid, anyhow, as to be nagged to death by a dern mule-haided woman."

Martha, with a gesture of unutterable despair, left him to his much-needed sleep. From a cupboard in the living room she secured her gingham slat-bonnet and, with purposeful decision, jammed it upon her head. Pausing only to assure herself that gran'mammy was in immediate need of nothing, she left the cabin.

In her resentment her thoughts surged turbulently, yet she tenaciously clung to one idea. Saul must be saved from his own weak self. A last expedient remained—a plan she had, in these last weary weeks, hugged to herself as the one remaining hope for his salvation. If that failed she felt that she must give up — nothing would avail.

Saul awoke with temples throbbing mightily. For a minute overladen with pain, he sat upon the edge of the bed, his aching head hard against his palms, scowling blackly at the floor. Then he drove himself into the kitchen, where Martha prepared the noon meal, and walked as straight as he might to the water bucket upon the box beneath the window-sill.

"You kin eat," Martha said shortly, and left him for the more congenial company of gran'mammy.

Saul dragged a chair to the table and, his tortured stomach rebelling, gritted an oath at the world in general, and viciously shoved the food from him as far as possi-

ble. In glowering silence he poured his coffee into the saucer.

Almost unconsciously, he noted that the black and steaming fluid was extremely bitter to the taste, but he thought that the fault of his drink-seared throat, and forced himself to drain the dish of the last drop.

He kicked the chair from under, and after a search found his hat in a corner. His mind was already heavily milling over his plans for the day, and he was ready to leave the room when his eyes were caught and held by the family jug that stood in squat invitation upon a shelf. Not bothering to pour a drink, he balanced it upon a shoulder, hooked a thumb into its handle, and, placing its earthen mouth to his lips, gulped a generous portion of the fiery stuff.

With never a glance for the two women on the porch, he passed them and set his feet upon the path to the trail. With her face devoid of its youthful color, the eyes of Martha clung to his back, and as she watched, Saul stopped short in a stride, swaying a bit, as if threatened with collapse.

Abruptly he turned, his features twitching, and literally fought his way back to the porch. Martha shrank against the old woman.

On the step he sat—and he would have sworn that never was a mortal in the mountains sicker than he. And no one, seeing him there, would have disagreed—the man looked it. At irregular intervals he heaved, every muscle of his body taut, and the face of no landsman upon the high seas ever told of misery more poignant.

Martha hesitatingly went to him. With the first knowledge of her closeness he shoved her away. For hours, it seemed to the girl, Saul sat there; when he finally arose and entered the cabin, he walked a sober man.

A little later he called to Martha. She ran in to him on wings of hope, glowing, but her eyes rounded into fear when she saw the cold menace of his bearing.

"Hit 'pears like you didn' wait fer somebody else to do hit," Saul remarked icily.

"Do whut?"

"Whut you wisht this mornin'—thet somebody ud pizen me. You couldn't wait, I reckon, an' thought you'd do hit yoreself," he contemptuously answered her.

The girl had forgotten the wish born of her fury and, as he gave her the memory of it, she started guiltily.

"In my coffee you put hit," Saul continued, flaying her with deliberate scorn. "You—you gal thet were rared with me—tryin' fer to pizen me—"

"Oh, I didn'—I didn', Saul!" she gasped.

"You liar!" he shouted, giving his rage control of his tongue. "You damn' naggin' pizener—you air lyin'!"

Shaking, he lifted above her a clenched fist, and the veins of the bare forearm stood out like network.

"Oh, Saul, how kin you—"

He did not strike her with his fist. His arm came down in a full-strengthened arc, landing against her shoulder, and she was swept from her feet to the floor. She lay there inert and began to sob.

"You git out!" Saul shouted again, his eyes blazing. "Git out 'fore I kick you out! Clean 'way from this here cabin, an' take damn' good keer to stay 'way!"

Even if she desired, she lacked the breath for an answer. He crossed to her.

"Git yore duds together an' go. I aim to be back to-night, an' ef you hain't gone by then—you'll be almighty sorry. You hear me?"

"I hear you," Martha whispered.

CHAPTER V.

IN POWDERTOWN.

BEHIND the forbidding twelve-foot fence, patrolled from dawn to dawn by keen-eyed men with rifles, all that one outside could see was the row of gigantic stacks from the mouths of which smoke poured unceasing. This was the powder plant beckoned into being by the mighty forefinger of war.

Across the main thoroughfare, and facing the guarded barrier, the more pretentious buildings of Powdertown squatted in all the ugliness of their painful newness. From the rear of these paint-hungry structures the town swept outward in an eye-filling maze

of wooden shacks, its farther edge, with piles of material indiscriminately scattered, bursting into a vast disorder like the cast-up wreckage of a hundred ships.

The town leaped into existence so swiftly—with so little premeditation—that it had as yet riotously escaped the notice of the law, which is something of a sluggard when confronted with no warning with a new order. And Powdertown was without precedent.

The affairs of the child of war was in the hands of a small coterie of men. Those in authority inside the fence, at the first, never interfered with the turbulent element outside. They had their own obstacles to overcome, and owned but one purpose—to make powder.

Gyp Jasper was of that group of lawless ones—by right of aggressiveness, one of the crime-spawned princes of Powdertown. Grasping opportunity by its nose, letting play his genial smile, he secured a site just across from the main entrance to the plant. Upon this plot he slapped up a two-story hotel—that is, a scrawl of letters above the front door so proclaimed to any who might pause and read.

In reality, Jasper's place was a dance-hall, possessing all the lures that such a joint called for in the blustering days of the West. In rooms at the rear of the dancing floor those of Powdertown could get swift action for any part, or all, of their wages. A generous space to the left was given over to chairs and tables, intimately grouped. There was no visible bar. That, after all, would be challenging disaster, for Powdertown sprawled its wicked self in a county that was bone-dry—theoretically.

Yet, through a cubby-hole near the tables, strong liquor was to be had at Jasper's—Saul Howell's run of white whisky.

To the right a flight of steps led to a sort of gallery which overlooked the entire floor. Upon this landing, that ran its narrow course the entire length of the house, the doors of the sleeping rooms opened.

Night was very near when Martha reached that fringe of Powdertown nearest the hills. Seeking the promised protection of Jasper, the girl had walked every rod of the distance from the cabin above the trail. Saul had driven her away—had in his unreasoning fury driven her into the arms of the man.

She stumbled wearily through a rubbish-littered street and came upon an unwashed fellow hurrying to his shack. In his astonishment the mechanic stopped short and eyed her critically, not able to comprehend the dusty, clumsy shoes, the gingham bonnet, the unwrapped bundle of clothes under her arm. Martha, in her innocence unafraid, squarely met the searching stare.

"Kin you tell me whar I kin find Mr. Jasper?" she asked.

"Jasper—Gyp Jasper?"

"That's him—Gyp Jasper."

He gave her the desired information, and Martha thanked him. As she moved on he stood a moment, his puzzled gaze resting upon her back.

"Funny-lookin' jane for a dance-hall," he muttered.

Gyp was "at home" when Martha, with modest hesitation, passed through the front door. There yet remained several hours before the sporting element of the powder city would seek recreation from the tribulations of the day, and the floor was deserted but for the debonair heart-breaker. His back to her, he stood at the cubby-hole indolently conversing with a hairy-armed dispenser of drink, but at the look of surprise that leaped into the eyes of his hireling Gyp turned.

Instantly, with inspired precision, he wheeled and slammed shut the door to the hole in the wall. There was one other inside besides *his* man. Then, white teeth punishing a cigar, he sauntered to the waiting girl.

"So you decided to come, dear, after all," he greeted easily, hiding with drooping lids the exultation in his eyes.

"Hit were decided fer me," Martha said frankly.

"How was that?"

"Saul drove me out—I felt like I jes' had to come," she told him simply.

Gyp's searching queries soon let him know the happenings of the day.

"The brute!" he stormed theatrically. "And he knocked you down?"

"Yes." Martha could not help but be honest, though she winced at the recollection. "But Saul didn' hit me—he jes' kind o' shoved me."

"Martha," the man assured, his voice a gentle caress, "he sha'n't insult you any more. You did exactly right—coming to the one who really loves you. You haven't got to slave for him."

Gravely, though he could have laughed at the absurdity of it, he took from the floor her poor little bundle and assisted her up to the gallery. And the room he led the girl into was much the best the house afforded. It was his own.

"You'll find here little enough of luxury," Jasper hastened to explain. "Though it's rather comfortable, Martha, this is a ramshackle place—but it's bringing the coin in to Gyp. In a short while, now, I'll clean up—then you and I are going away from here to a city where we can really live. Eh, girl?"

He playfully chucked her under her rounded chin, and Martha forced her lips into a tired smile.

"Before the crowd comes for the evening I'll have one of the girls in with some clothes," Gyp casually remarked.

"I hev clothes," Martha said.

"Oh, I mean real clothes, girl," he lightly retorted. "Clothes that will display your charms—not hide them. Why, it takes keen eyes such as mine"—he chuckled—"to discern your real loveliness."

Martha surveyed him in mild astonishment.

"Make yourself at home, now," Gyp continued. "Lie down and rest. I'll have to busy myself down-stairs for a while."

Martha, her thoughts a billowing mass of contradictions, relaxed upon the bed until a discreet tap bade her to the door. She found there a darky with supper. The girl ate the warm food gratefully, but she could not entirely entice from her mind the images of Saul and gran'mammy until, a little later, one of the dancing girls came bustling in with an armful of her own flimsy finery.

Meekly Martha gave herself into the hands of the visitor, who had received explicit instructions from Jasper. When the girl had finished her assigned task she immediately slipped outside and beckoned to one who waited impatiently. He bounded up the steps, passing the rouged one on the gallery.

"You've picked a winner this time, Gyp," the girl laughed.

"You said it, Lou," Jasper complacently retorted.

Yet even he was startled by the superb, youthful beauty of her. Martha was standing before a mirror—feasting her sparkling eyes, and her cheeks glowed at the vision of her own splendor. Gyp came in softly, and in the glass she bestowed upon him a smile—a grateful smile, and radiant.

"By George!" the man ejaculated in sincere admiration. "You're a queen!"

"A queen?"

"My queen!" he exclaimed, advancing with arms outstretched. "You're simply wonderful!"

"Hit's the clothes, I reckon, thet makes me so purty."

"The clothes help," he promptly agreed. "But you—yourself—you're a beauty."

She colored with pleasure.

"I nuver thought," she said shyly, "thet I'd hev such a purty dress fer to git married in."

"Married in!" Jasper echoed, his face blank.

"Yes, to be married in," Martha continued, her attention wholly upon her own surprising self. "When you kep' on after me to leave Saul an' gran'mammy—"

"I never mentioned marriage," he cut in brutally.

"You hain't nuver mentioned marriage?" She was entirely artless in her amazement. "Didn' you ast me—didn' you 'mos' beg me—to leave Saul an' gran'mammy an' come an' live with you?"

"I never offered marriage," Jasper told her coldly.

The girl did not seem angry—apparently she was more puzzled than anything else. Her candid eyes stayed with his until he averted his face.

"You mean, then, thet we hain't a goin' to git married?"

He gained the hardihood to laugh.

"Of course not."

"But"—for the first time she faltered—"I cain't go back to Saul."

"You don't have to, you know," Gyp spoke evenly. "I love you, Martha—love you too much to ever strike you, as he did. Stick to me, and you'll never want for anything."

"Ef you love me—why cain't you marry me?" she asked spiritlessly.

"Oh, I'm not the marrying kind," he carelessly replied.

She sought a seat and stared thoughtfully before her, seeing nothing. And it seemed to the girl that—always—when she reached for happiness she grasped only ashes.

"Look, Martha!" Jasper caught her hands and smilingly forced her to the door. He swung it wide, and from the gallery Martha gazed down on the floor, now thronged with hilarious dancers. The wail and shriek of syncopated music beat upon her unheeding ears, while from the cubby-hole aproned bruisers grabbed loaded trays for those grouped at the tables.

"That's the life," Jasper whispered tensely. "See those girls? There is Lou, who helped you with the clothes. You'd be surprised at the money they make. I pay them a salary and a percentage on the drinks the men with them buy. They get the coin, all right, and you could do better than any of them."

"You want thet I should do thet?"

"You'd be a winner down there."

She backed into the room. Jasper followed.

"I couldn't do thet—whut they air doin'," Martha said. "I cain't dance."

He snapped his fingers.

"That's nothing. You can learn in a day or two. I'll teach you myself." He beamed upon her. "With your natural grace—why, you were born to be a dancer, girl!"

"I don' know whut I were borned fer," she replied, "an' I cain't seem to find out."

"Let me help you find yourself," Gyp whispered, and his arm curved around her waist.

Martha, displaying no emotion, released herself from his tender embrace.

"I'm jes' 'bout tired out," she said plaintively. "My mind is overfull—I cain't even think."

"You can't go back to him."

"No—I cain't go back to Saul."

Some one rapped upon the door. With a frown of displeasure Jasper heard that his presence was required below. With a casual word he left the room, and not until he was from her sight did he allow full play to the smirking smile that grossly revealed the full redness of his lips. Whatever she decided, he was master of the situation.

Alone, Martha stepped once more to the mirror, and she saw not the shadow of a smile upon her lips, nor in the depths of her eyes. Still thoughtfully, she crossed the room and fingered the knob. The door was locked.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT.

DAN SNEAD had been one of the two in the room behind the cubby-hole when Jasper, espying Martha, slammed shut the little door. Yet with all his keen-witted promptness, Gyp was a bit too slow for the quick eyes of the mountaineer, though the taciturn Dan intuitively made no comment. Later, his business completed, he left the dance-hall in his usual leisurely manner, but once clear of the town he rode hard.

Thus it occurred that Saul Howell rode through the night toward Powdertown, and cursing with him along the trail were the Snead boys, their hard, lean faces thrust eagerly forward like lanky hounds on a blood scent. They were Saul's paid men, and, aside from that, his friends, and they profanely held that an enemy of Howell's was an enemy of the Sneads.

Very near to one in the morning the ungentle rabble in Jasper's place had thinned itself by more than a half. A few yards down the street three grim-visaged riders dismounted and secured their horses. Dan, because of his familiarity with the surroundings, volunteered to take care of the rear, while Saul and Jim entered the front.

Gyp was talking with the woman Lou when he saw the armed pair, and the lighted cigar slipped from his surprise-slackened

lips. The two swung silently in, their rifles ready, their shoulders hunched, alert and crouching. Seeing them in that attitude, no gambler or woman there could doubt that they would kill—if killing was necessary.

Saul, his lips stretched tight across his teeth, did not trouble to speak. With an eloquent gesture of his rifle, he herded the roisterers, men and women, and then, as if with an invisible broom, swept them to that side of the room nearest the gallery. Though most of them thought it a hold-up, none owned the audacity to even question the voiceless commands of the gun-muzzle.

Jasper, knowing why those men had come —knowing that their leader would presently talk to him—stood his ground, and though acute fear agitated his rotten heart, he urged a smile sarcastic to his lips.

He turned toward the cubby-hole, hoping for assistance there, in time to see a rifle slide through, and behind it was the face of Dan, each high cheek-bone a burning spot of red. At his appearance Saul strode close to Jasper, leaving the others under the guns of the brothers.

"Whar's Martha?" Saul demanded with no ceremony.

"How do I know?" Gyp questioned in turn, deciding in the instant to plead ignorance.

"Whar's the gal, I say?" Saul thundered, the black of impatient anger clouding his features.

"I don't know!" Jasper snapped.

"You air lyin'—you do know whar she's at," Saul scowlingly accused. "Dan seed her when she come in this here place."

The eyes of the mountaineer—hard and menacing—made Gyp falter in his purpose. Saul had drank himself into a mood that was dangerous—he was hotly careless of consequences, and Jasper heeded the threatening glare.

"She's here," he hastily admitted. "She's in one of those rooms up there, Saul."

"Don' you call me Saul, man." Howell's voice was vibrant with the force of the warning.

"She came here of her own accord—I didn't make her come," Jasper muttered defensively.

"Don' I know thet?" Saul spoke softly —too softly. "Ef you *had* someways made her come, do you think thet you'd be standin' thar — 'live — talkin' to Saul Howell? Jasper, ef you had done thet you'd be a daid crittur an' down in hell by now!"

And the man knew that he heard raw truth.

"Well?"

The one word from Saul was so fraught with meaning that Jasper turned immediately and made for the stairs. The man from the hills followed him closely. And when they descended from the gallery a Martha of sober face was with them.

"Take the gal out, Jim, an' put her on my horse," Saul rasped. "You, Dan, watch *'em,*" he added, jerking his head toward the bewildered herd.

He waited until Martha was from sight and hearing.

"Now, purty man," he spoke, talking to Gyp, "I'm a goin' fer to whup you—an' whup you good. You need some damn' mean teachin', an' I'm a goin' to give hit to you."

His gun was laid carefully upon a nearby table, and two vein-netted, knotted fists were held on high.

"With these," he said.

"You challenge me to fight?" Jasper eagerly blurted.

"I hain't challengin' you to nothin'," Saul savagely informed him. "I'm jes' a goin' to *whup* you!"

Saul's condescending manner was a maddening taunt to Jasper, and he surged forward. He had confidence in his fistic ability, and experience had made him aware of the moral effect of the first lusty blow. So he carried the fight to the ungainly man from the hills.

Saul owned no conscience. In fist fights his tactics were to hit as hard and as often as possible, and with Jasper's rush he met him half-way and swarmed upon the softer man like a wire-muscled catamount.

Jasper was unable to withstand the wild onslaught, and he gave ground, his lips bleeding from a smash. Saul bored after him, all over the man again, and a ramming jolt to the jaw sent his opponent sprawling. Howell crouched over him, his

chest heaving with the lust of battle, his fists hanging loosely.

"Git up—till I git done with you!"

It was evident to the onlookers that Gyp did not particularly relish the idea of again acting as the target for that human battering-ram. Stubbornly he stayed to the floor, and Saul booted him, not evilly, but just to add hurt pride to physical hurt. He secured his rifle and stood again over the vanquished one.

"I reckon I'll leave you as you air, you whelp, bein' as you won't git up," he said. "I told you thet I'd whup you. An' ef you want to know whut fer, I don' mind tellin' you an' yore friends thet I jes' don' like the looks o' yore purty face. Hit needed a bit o' sp'ilin'!"

With the words he was gone, and simultaneously the glowering face of Dan disappeared from the hole in the wall.

The three and Martha put the town behind them, and soon the hoofs of the horses were pounding the road that led to the mountain trail. Martha rode behind Saul, and, of necessity, her arms were around him.

She glowed with a mild wonder that it was Saul who had liberated her. Only the afternoon before he had driven her from him, and now—he was taking her home.

Struggling down to Powdertown, she had thought—and soothing her lacerated feelings with the salve of the outsider's love, she had relished the thought—that never again would she be beholden to Saul. But a puzzling fate manifestly decreed that their lives should remain intertwined, and riding home with him and the Snead boys—home folks—she was content.

Dan and Jim had continued up the trail with the horses, and Saul and Martha had climbed to the porch. The girl was humble and grateful, and she spoke, intending to express her appreciation of what had been done.

"Saul—I want to thank you—fer comin' down an' gittin' me—an' takin' me back."

"I don' need yore thanks," Saul roughly replied and passed into the cabin.

He felt keenly the need of a drink, and dragged the jug from the shelf. Martha, her forgiving heart numb with the harshness of his reply, came in and watched him silently as he gulped a glass near brimming.

"You say you don' need my thanks," she said diffidently, yet wanting to understand. "Why did you ride down thar fer me?"

"Why?" The liquor drove color into his haggard face, and he laughed sneeringly. "You don' think I done hit 'cause I wanted to do hit?"

"I'm askin'."

"Gran'mammy needs you—*thet's* why I rid' down thar an' took you," he told her coldly. "So fer's I'm consarned you could hev stayed 'way the res' o' yore life an' I wouldn' hev giv' a whoopin' damn!"

He stood the jug upon the table and pulled up a chair defiantly, as if for an extended session, and Martha, who all the way home had timidly entertained a thought that love had sent Saul after her into the valley, left him scowling there. She crept to the room where granmammy slept, her head drooping, utterly crushed.

CHAPTER VII.

GYP AGAIN.

GRAN'MAMMY HOWELL did not need the care of Martha long after the liberation of the girl. Less than a week later the old woman was laid to rest eternal in the shabby little burying-ground on the hillside up the trail.

Martha's grief was sincere, yet, true to her nature, she indulged in no outburst. With features a bit more impassive than usual, she attended to the details of the simple funeral, quietly taking from the thoughtless Saul all the cares of such a trial.

The old woman's passing had little or no effect upon her grandson. To him the sturdy grandmother of his boyhood was long since gone, and he held no place—nor desired any—in the last prattling days of her second childhood. Such are the ways of men—even the best of them.

Indeed, Saul seemed to begrudge the hours lost from his beloved still—the little time necessary to stand beside Martha at the grave of his grandmother. And all

through the crisis of the mutual loss, which might have brought them together, he ignored her, and upon this stubborn course he was assisted by the sorrowing girl, who, in the hurt of her injured pride, shunned him except when others were with them.

She was in her blackest mood now, this evening of gran'mammy's return to the Mother Earth. Her aching brain wrenched this way and that, retaining, coming back always to, one absolute fact. It was impossible to stay longer at the old home.

And to Martha, in her dispirited loneliness, there came the love-driven Gyp.

In the first hours after she had been taken from his place the man had shrugged his shoulders, laughingly asking himself what was one woman more or less in his life. Yet, somehow, the smiling image of her, so artless in unspoiled beauty, lived clearly in his cynical mind. And as the hours grew into days the desire for her—the desire for even a sight of her—gradually overcame his fear of Saul Howell.

And he decided that he would make another attempt to secure for himself the girl. Also, there was revenge—the wish to square himself with the man who had scornfully beaten him, and booted him, under the eyes of his cronies.

Just before twilight he secreted his horse down the trail below the spring. Cautiously he negotiated the remaining distance to the cabin, and from cover watched until thoroughly satisfied that the mountaineer —unless asleep— was not in the vicinity. Up the hillside Gyp climbed, avoiding the path to the porch, and approached the house from the side. In the kitchen he espied Martha, and at his low-pitched call she came outside.

"Is he here?" Gyp questioned, almost in a whisper.

"He's over to the still," Martha answered apathetically, displaying neither sorrow nor gladness at his coming, only stark indifference.

She took a seat on a bench under the hanging eaves, and Jasper, nodding his satisfaction, selected a place beside her.

"Martha," he spoke abruptly, "you went away the other night with no word for me. Now you must tell me if you care for me—if you love me. I've come up for an answer. My love for you *made* me come —drove me up to you. How much longer are you going to stand for that rummy?"

The girl winced.

"I don't know whut to do," she answered colorlessly. "Saul—he hain't treatin' me right. I thought he would hev after he rid down thar fer me, but he still thinks more o' thet darn still than he does o' me. He hain't got no time fer me no more, but after he druv me out—he took me back, an' I jes' cain't make up my mind to go 'way agin an' leave him."

"You owe him nothing; you don't have to stay here," Jasper emphatically declared. "You have my love to lean on, girl. You're nothing in *his* life but a door-mat—something to wipe his dirty feet on. What is there now to keep you from leaving him? I'm asking you to marry me, dear."

"I wonder ef you would," she mused aloud.

"On my honor," he urged passionately. "How I love you, Martha! My waking moments are filled with thoughts of you, and my sleep is caressed with dreams of you. Dear, I'll take you away, and give you happiness and real life. We'll live—I for you and you for me."

"I jes' cain't make up my mind," she answered dully.

"Think of the wonderful things I've talked to you of—that you have never seen," he continued smoothly. "The beautiful sights you never *will* see if you stay here with him. Come, Martha, say one word—give me just one sign of assent, and we'll ride down the trail of happiness together!"

In the forgetfulness of his ardor he reached for her, to wrap her in his arms, and she sprang from him.

"Not yit! Not yit!" she cried. "I hain't give in to you yit!"

The wily Gyp understood that he had been too hasty.

"Sit down, Martha. I wouldn't scare you," he soothingly assured her. "It was only that my love got the better of me for a moment."

Martha sat again.

"I hain't afeared o' you," she told him.

"You took me so by s'prise. You cain't tech me till I give you my word; an' when I do *thet*, I won't keer much whut happens. I'm dyin' sick o' all this here!"

"I can well understand that," Gyp answered warmly. "Come with me, and you'll never for a moment know regret."

"I jes' cain't seem to make up my mind," she told him again wearily. "I hev been tryin' to think hit out, but my pore haid's nigh bustin'. Ef—ef Saul would only stop his makin' likker an' his drinkin' hit, an' take some notice o' me—jes' a little—I could make myself content here fer the res' o' my days, I reckon. But he don', an"—her voice rose passionately—"I hain't gittin' *nothin'* out o' life!"

"The decision is with you; you are your own woman. Come with me and you'll *get* something out of life—a love worth while."

"An' I'd hev to pay," Martha retorted in a matter-of-fact manner. "You fooled me onct, an' whut's to keep you from doin' hit agin? Yit ef I made up my mind to go—"

"Why don't you, dear? I can't be coming up here forever. If that rummy saw me—"

"Saul would kill you," she said.

"Perhaps," Gyp returned. He showed her a holster, in which reposed an automatic, strapped under his left arm. "And perhaps not," he significantly added.

In spite of his brave words, he shivered in the warm night. It was black dark now, and a silence fell upon them. Martha was engaged with her bitter cogitations, and Gyp sat far from ease.

"I hev made up my mind," Martha presently spoke. "When Saul comes home, I'll give him jes' one more chanst. This time to-morrer night, ef you kin come up here agin—jes' one more time—you kin hev my answer. Ef I'm waitin' at the spring down thar, thet 'll mean thet I'm ready to go with you, but ef I hain't thar, you mought's well nuver come up agin. Thet 'll mean that Saul wants me."

"If I must, I suppose I must," Gyp complained. "Anyhow, to-morrow night I'm certain that you'll be waiting at the spring, dear, waiting for the one who can make it worth your while to live. You little mountain witch"—his voice was sugary—"my love for you would make me do much more than that to win you. It is dangerous, you know, me coming up here like this."

"Hit shore is," Martha gravely agreed.

Together they left the bench, and Gyp decisively grasped her around the waist. Ardently, now almost sure of her, he drew her to him and tried to kiss her. Martha placed the heel of her palm beneath his chin and held away his hungry lips.

"Just one—one little kiss, girl," he entreated.

"No," she sturdily denied him. "Ef things happen that I give in to you, then you'll hev ever'thing, but till then—nothin'. I'll be true to the one till his not noticin' me drives me agin to the other."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "REVENOOERS."

SAUL came home in the early hours of the morning, and Martha had no opportunity to talk with him. It was 'way past noon when he clumped from his bedroom into the kitchen, finding there a hot meal upon the table. Martha was not in sight.

He washed his face and ran a comb through his hair, then sought the table, where he cautiously tasted the coffee from a spoon. He poured a little into a saucer and, in the manner of one making sure, he tasted it again. Puzzled anger took possession of his features as he slowly and deliberately set the dish back to the table.

He sat an instant in deep thought. The coffee was bitter—it tasted exactly as it had the afternoon he had become so deathly ill—the afternoon he had driven Martha away. A flush of red, unreasoning anger mantled his face to the roots of his unruly hair, and he gripped the edge of the table, struggling mightily until he bridled his violent temper. When he called to Martha his voice was devoid of the passion that had shaken him.

She came in from the porch, haggard and colorless. Saul left the chair and pointed a finger at the coffee.

"Whut 'bout hit now?" he demanded.

Martha was unable to answer at once. For a brief moment she drooped before him like a wilted flower, then with visible effort she straightened herself and met the accusation of his eyes.

"Whut 'bout whut?"

He stared her down—implacably.

"Whut 'bout this here pizen?"

"I didn't reckon hit 'ud hurt you mortal," she lifelessly replied. "Hit hain't pizen."

"Hit haint?" There was a mountain of doubt in his tone. "Why 'd you put hit in my coffee, then?"

She began to weep—softly.

"Oh, Saul—I'm mos' crazy! I wanted *so* to make you quit drinkin' an' operatin', an' you wouldn' lissen to me. I wanted—an' tried to—make you sick o' hit all, like as I am. Ever' night, an' all the time, you leave me by myself—an'—hit's lonesome, Saul. Even when gran'mammy went hit didn' make no diffrunce to you. You wouldn' take no notice o' me. I jes' had to do somethin'—an' I didn't keer how desperit!"

She choked with the very violence of her sobs.

"When you come home this mornin', 'fore daylight, I could tell by the way you stomped in thet you was drunk agin, an' I laid thar in bed an' felt fer my gran'-mammy who wan't thar, an' then in my mortal misery I give up all hopes o' talkin' you out o' yore meanness.

"Las' week, the day you was so sick, I went up the trail while you was sleepin' to ole A'nt Becky's an' asted her fer somethin' to make you stop drinkin'—to make you sick o' likker. She had told me to come an' ast fer hit ef I needed hit. She give me some powders thet she had made herself from some kind o' yerbs, an' told me to put hit in yore coffee. I used some o' hit *thet* day.

"When I fixed yore grub jes' now, I used up the res'. I reckon I were crazy to do hit, Saul; but I were willin' to do anything short o' killin' you to make you stop all thet meanness, an'—an'—git you to lovin' me agin. I wanted thet you should come back to my heart like the man you used to be 'fore you started to runnin' thet hellish still!"

She looked up at him, fearfully, wet lashes not quite covering eyes that pleaded forgiveness as plainly as if they owned the power of speech. The man averted his face, his rough features twitching with some strong emotion which Martha could not comprehend.

She faltered toward him, her arms held beseechingly; and Saul, with a strangled oath of disgust, brushed past her, and ran out of the cabin, down the path to the trail. With a moan in her sob-stricken throat, Martha crept into her bed, and dropped across it.

Darkness came, and with it Jasper; and he found Martha awaiting him at the spring. In spite of her loyalty to the indifferent Howell, the fellow was not at all surprised to see her there. Like all creatures cursed by vanity, he held a faith supreme in his fascinations.

"So you're ready, sweetheart," he greeted gently.

"I'm a goin' with you," she answered.

Gyp was quite satisfied. He knew that the girl was not by nature demonstrative. They turned their backs upon the lightless cabin, and started down the trail for the hidden nook where Jasper's horse was tethered.

To the ears of Martha came the thud of tramping hoofs, and she felt the hand of Gyp upon her arm as he guided her into the concealment of the brush at the edge of the trail. And so they stood, peering into the night. A group of horsemen rode somberly past, rifles across their saddles—seven the girl counted while she dared not breathe.

"Revenooers!" she gasped.

CHAPTER IX.

WARNING.

"REVENUERS is right!" Gyp affirmed with a delighted chuckle. "They're not losing any time. I scarcely expected them up here to-night."

"Whut do you know o' 'em?" Martha

asked, chill fear checking the beat of her heart. It was well that he could see her face but dimly.

"What do I know? Why, I sent them up here," he complacently informed her.

"You sent 'em after Saul?"

"You guessed it the first time!" He laughed in evident relish. "That rummy is operating just one night too many!"

New blood tumbled through the veins of the listless Martha, and she stiffened into fighting alertness. The cold treachery of Jasper—his bantering acknowledgement of it—gave instantaneous birth to a hate of him that sickened her.

"You don' know whar the still is at," she said, endeavoring to keep the venom from her voice.

"Oh, you told me, little girl." The joke was much too good to be enjoyed alone. "A little at a time in our conversations up at the cabin."

She stood as if of carved granite as she comprehended the irony of it.

"Now listen, dear," Gyp spoke smoothly, sensing a change in her. "Don't let's think any more of the fellow. He'll get what's coming to him. They all get caught sooner or later." Gloatingly he laughed again. "Kick me, will he? I guess we're even now.

"I had it all figured out, Martha. If we went away from here, as I knew we would, we'd never know peace of mind as long as he was free. I just had to get him, somehow; and putting the revenue men onto him was the one best bet. Don't you see?"

Martha did not answer—she scarcely heard. Standing there, her hands savagely clenched, she fought for composure—the power to reason. She, in her trusting foolishness, had described the location of Saul's still. The officers were following the trail, the long way round to Bearcub Run. There was a fair chance if she took the short cut that Saul invariably traveled, of reaching him in time. He *must* be warned.

The girl felt coursing at the very foundation of her heart the sweet thrill of her old, unquestioning love of Saul. Now she *knew* that she loved him—only him—still or no still. He was her man and she was his woman. If with him happiness was not destined for her, then she would gladly accept unhappiness.

The footpath left the trail farther along, and Martha wheeled sharply toward it. So intense had been the searching of her soul that Gyp was forgotten, but his presence was recalled when he grasped her arm.

"Where are you going, Martha?"

"To Saul"—simply.

"Like hell you are!" he swore, throwing aside the cloak of gentle language.

That arm of Martha which was free flashed out and down in a sweeping arc, and her hand fell solidly against the leering face of him. She wrestled herself away, leaving a sleeve of her waist in his clutching fingers.

She raced to the opening that parted the thicket and plunged blindly in, and Gyp, in cursing consternation, took himself after her. Martha stumbled down the hill, in her ears the sound of pursuit.

She stepped upon a small log and it rolled, throwing her heavily. Like a stricken creature of the woods she leaped erect, only to stagger a pace and slump again to the ground. A tearing pain ravished her ankle.

"Saul," she huskily called.

He would never be warned.

"Saul—Saul!" she whimpered.

Jasper leaned over her.

"Martha!" he challenged sharply.

"My ankle!" she groaned. "Hit's busted!"

"What can I do?"—helplessly.

"Git me out o' here," she entreated.

With her in his arms he struggled back to the trail, where he released her to the earth.

"Why did you leave me, Martha?"

"I—I were so upset—seein' 'em revenooers," she replied.

"You promised to go with me."

"I'm a goin'."

"Then come on; I'll help you to the horse."

"Man!" she cried in anguish. "Cain't you see that I'm sufferin' hell? Tote me up to the cabin so I kin get some liniment an' rub my ankle 'fore we go."

"Why can't I get it for you?"

"You'd nuver find hit, Gyp."

For the first time his familiar cognomen passed her lips, yet even that event could not make Jasper forget the steep ascent to the cabin. Martha was no featherweight.

"It would be quite a task to carry you—"

"An' I thought you was a man!" she scornfully interrupted.

Gyp carried her up to the cabin. Breathing heavily, he sat on the porch steps and wiped his dripping forehead with a handkerchief. When the cloth came away from his eyes he gazed into the muzzle of his own automatic, unwavering in the hand of the girl.

"Martha!"

"Yes, Martha!" she jeered. "The fool gal o' the hills with yore gun. An' I'll dern quick use it, mister!"

Instinctively feeling of the empty holster, Jasper started toward her.

"Git back, damn you!" she swore. "Git back an' do whut I tell you to!"

"What do you want?"—uneasily.

She gritted her teeth so savagely that the skin of the man crawled, yet she managed to hobble a few yards from the step.

"On the porch over thar in the fer corner you kin find a bundle o' lightwood knots," she told him. "Go git 'em an' stick 'em in a row under the eaves o' the cabin. Then light 'em—light 'em all. An' hurry!"

"You would burn the cabin?"

"After whut I hev done, I'd burn a thousand cabins to save Saul Howell—an' *then* call hit cheap!" she hotly retorted.

He made no move to obey her precise commands.

"Mister," Martha said deliberately, "ef you don' git a move on an' light 'em knots, this here gun o' yores is a goin' to do some burnin'—an' hit hain't a goin' to burn no wood!"

Gyp labored and the dry edge of the eaves was soon in the grasp of a struggling blaze. The eager fire rolled up the roof while Martha stood motionless and watched, her face white in the flare.

"What do you think this will accomplish?" Gyp asked her, surlily curious.

"Saul Howell will come a runnin' when he sees his home on fire," Martha flashed triumphantly. "He or one o' the boys air bounden to see the blaze from the ridge over thar. Ef Saul hain't at the still when the revenooers git thar, they won't nuver git him."

Jasper swore lustily.

"An' you'd best not stand thar cussin'," Martha continued. "You'd best git yore horse an' skedaddle. Ef Saul comes an' finds you here, thar'll be trouble, mister, as shore as hell!"

"I'm sorry I bothered with you," Jasper growled.

"Nobody asted you to."

"You never cared for me, anyhow."

"Mebbe not," Martha calmly replied; "but I didn't *know* thet till 'em revenooers come up an' you told me you had sent 'em. *Then* I knowed. Love you!" She leaned toward him, in her eyes wrathful contempt. "Ef she knowed it—could a woman love a yaller, mangy-hearted dog?"

Jasper shrugged his shoulders and slunk down the hill. He had no desire to face Saul Howell. When he had faded from her sight, Martha dropped to the ground and crawled from the danger of falling logs. The cabin now blazed high, a beacon that illumined the entire mountainside.

CHAPTER X.

AND THEN—

MARTHA never knew just how long she lay. In a sort of stupor she heard some one frantically scrambling up the trail. It was Saul; she knew it.

"Martha!" he called. The girl glowed, forgetting her aching ankle, at the fear in his voice.

She sat erect, and at the same instant he espied her and strode to her side, his gaunt shoulders sagging, like a runner near spent.

"How did hit happen, Martha?" he questioned. "How come the cabin afire?"

"I done hit."

"You done hit?"

"I done hit to save you, Saul."

Weary and bewildered, he sank to the ground beside her.

"To save me?"

"The revenooers come up," she went on

quietly. "I seen seven o' 'em ridin' to'ard Bearcub, and I knowed they was after you. So I fired the cabin, knowin' ef you thought the leastes' bit o' me, you'd leave the still an' come. Oh, Saul, I was so skeered that they'd git you!"

In silent understanding he reached for her hand and held it between his own. Martha snuggled close to him in restful content.

"Saul," she murmured. "I'm so happy thet they didn't git you. What o' the Snead boys?"

"They won't git 'em, neither."

"An' what o' you, Saul? They'll find the still an' git ev'dence. You'll hev to go into the woods?"

"Thar 'll be no ev'dence," Saul declared.

"No ev'dence?"

Saul aimed a lean finger at Bearcub Run.

"Thar 'll be no ev'dence, Martha," he repeated. "You see that fire over thar?"

She focused wondering eyes on a deep-red glow which hung above the distant tree-tops.

"I see hit."

"Thet's the still."

"Then the revenooers air thar? They air burnin' the still?"

"They hain't thar yit, I reckon. I fired the still myself, gal. The kittles air on the bottom o' the run.

"Martha—to-day when you up an' told me all 'bout 'em powders, an' showed me how bad you wanted me to give hit all up, hit come to me like a blast o' hell-fire how mean an' no 'count I had come to be—how I were keepin' you in misery. Lord, gal, when you helt out your purty arms to me, I were so mad at whut I were thet I cussed—I cussed myself—an' run 'way from you to keep from takin' you in my arms an' lovin' you."

"Thet's whut I wanted, Saul"—naively.

"Somehow I couldn't—right then. All the little good thet were left in me took holt o' me an' made me know thet I was bounden to come to you clean—purged o' all my mean cussedness. I swore I'd prove myself to you by destroyin' the still thet you hated so much. I done quit fer good!"

"You would hev come back to me, anyhow, Saul?"

"Shorely, Martha. I had fired the still an' was on my way when I fust seed the blazin' o' the cabin. An' then I run."

In answer to his anxious queries she narrated for him—not sparing herself—all the events of the evening. And when she had ended, Saul glowered blackly through the night toward Powdertown. He spoke guttural in his anger.

"I'll go down thar—"

"No, no, Saul," Martha interrupted, a restraining hand upon his arm. "He's gone—gone clean out o' my life. Let him be."

"To think how nigh I come to losin' you," Saul said thoughtfully. "To think whut a blind fool I were to let him keep on comin' up here."

"Then you knowed?" She was startled.

"Many's the time I watched from the bresh," he somberly admitted.

"Why didn't you say somethin', Saul?"

"I come to think thet you loved him."

"Loved him?"

"Yes; an' after our fust quar'l I were too dern mule-haided to ast you anything. An' thinkin' o' hit, Martha, I jes' kept on swillin' likker to keep myself *from* thinkin' o' hit."

"Saul—Saul."

"An' the day thet I knocked you down, I suffered hell, gal, that day, as I should hev."

"Let's fergit hit all, Saul; let's put hit behind us an' think o' whut is comin'."

"Thar's two fires burnin' now, Martha," he told her softly. "One over thar on Bearcub an' the cabin here. The still is the fire o' meanness burnin' itself out o' my heart, an' the cabin is the fire o' love an' goodness burnin' high in *yore* heart.

"Look! The fire on the ridge is nigh out now, but whar the cabin is, a better one will be built, an' thar—a fire will al'ays burn, Martha—our home-fire. Is thet right, gal?"

"Thet's right, man," Martha whispered.

He held her closer and kissed her, gravely, as if he performed a sacred rite, and Martha sighed like a sleepy child. Saul was taking notice of her.

(The end.)

A Liberal Education

by Gilbert Riddell

"FRED WILLS has invited us to dine with him," said Mr. Harry Hardy, glancing at his pretty wife with something of apprehension in his honest, gray eyes.

"Well?" inquired that efficient, young society leader, without raising her slender form from the pink-cushioned chaise-lounge on which she rested—"what of it?"

"Oh, nothing," hastily replied Mr. Hardy—"only"—he paused uncertainly.

Then Minnie Hardy did sit up, smoothing out the dainty chiffons, piled one over the other that she and her dressmaker regarded as a "lounging robe," and regarded her stalwart, young husband steadily and withal shrewdly. "Only what?" she demanded.

"Oh, nothing," he repeated, shifting from one foot to the other, as he stood in front of his chiffonier and straightened a tie. "Only—well, he has invited us for Wednesday night."

"What of that?" demanded Minnie. "I know nothing about Wednesday night that makes it undesirable for dinner engagements. And—we happen to have no previous entanglements for that night."

"Oh, haven't we?" queried Harry, a note of disappointment in his voice. "Fred thought we might have."

Then battle flared in Minnie's large blue eyes.

"Oh, so that's why he invited us—he just wanted the credit of inviting us, without the expense of our acceptance. After all we've done for him—having him here nearly every night—letting him be the chief beau at all our parties, taking him on week-ends all over the country. Why, come to think of it, he has never repaid our hospitality the least little bit—unless you call the flowers and candies he occasionally sends me repayment."

"That's it," interrupted Harry eagerly; "you see he couldn't very well repay us until he came into his money—and you know his mother had the power to keep him out of it until he was twenty-five. He was twenty-five yesterday, and now he wants to do something to show his gratitude to you. That's the way he put it."

"Gratitude to me," blazed Minnie, "I should think he would begin to consider his obligations! Why, every time his mother picked out a cross-eyed wall-flower for him to marry I saved him!"

"Yes," murmured Harry, "even when they weren't cross-eyed—and that's why he wants us to dine with him at the Wallington."

"Well," said Minnie, sinking back comfortably among her pink-silk, lace-covered cushions, "accept."

Harry ran his finger around inside his collar and coughed.

Minnie gazed at him sharply.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "what's the matter with you now?"

"N-nothing," said Harry—then with the air of bitter determination he added grimly—"Fred is inviting us because he wants us to meet his stenographer."

"Oh!" Minnie sat bolt upright—for a second there was intense silence—then she demanded "Why?"

"Well," said Harry, "he's very fond of her. He knew, of course, you wouldn't approve, so he told me not to keep you in the dark—to let you know wh-what friends they've been and all that—and he said if you didn't want to come he wouldn't be offended."

"So!" Minnie rose to her full, slender height. "That's it, is it? He was carrying on with a girl in his office all the time I thought I was rescuing him from wallflowers. And now he has the audacity to ask me to meet her. Very well, I'll meet her."

Harry trembled. "My dear, if it is distasteful to you," he began.

Minnie waved her hand. "This is not a situation in which to consider myself. I must think of others, as I always do. I am thinking of Fred's mother—I am thinking of Fred. This is worse than a wallflower. Incidentally, I am thinking of the poor, deluded, little girl. I must save her, too—have you thought of that, Harry?"

Harry shook his head hurriedly; he had thought of nothing but "putting over" this outrageous invitation so that his highly conventional wife would not be shocked out of her usual orbit.

"Well, then, I have," said Minnie. "I have heard of these cases before—I know what the end of this wild romance will be for that poor girl—it is my duty to save her while there is yet time." She paused and walked over to her husband, put her hands on his shoulders, and looked firmly into his eyes. That is, she would have looked if he had not hastily curtained them with his eyelids. "That is," she said, "I suppose there is still time. I suppose Fred hasn't—hasn't actually made love to the girl yet?"

Harry leaned over so far that he could see nothing but the floor and objects reposing thereon.

"Oh, no," he murmured, "I guess everything's perfectly proper so far."

Mrs. Minnie Hardy belonged to that "sheltered" class of women who, having no experience of offices, assume that every attention paid by an employer to a woman employee is an insult to the latter. She was, however, of a sweet and charitable disposition, and loyal to her sex. She never thought of the women employees as "vampires," as many of her class did, but invariably blamed the men for their attentions. She had a bit of the martyr in her blood, a longing to be of use to her fellow women, to reform them, to lead them into right paths, *et cetera*. She looked forward to that Wednesday dinner with exultation. Here, at last, was an opportunity for her to catch a deluded victim during the very initiating process of her delusion and save her. It was out of the question, of course, that Fred should marry the poor girl—Fred, the handsome, debonair heir to millions! Besides, there was her sister Bessie—a smile dimpled Mrs. Hardy's cheeks. She was exactly the right type for Fred's wife.

Harry noted the triumphant, militant, reformer look in Minnie's eye, and quaked inwardly as they approached the Wallington.

Fred seemed unable to notice anybody or anything long, save the dainty little girl he introduced as "Miss Jennie Warren."

He did glance a bit apprehensively at Mrs. Hardy as he introduced the girl, but Mrs. Hardy was all graciousness—she proceeded at once to put the poor working-girl at her ease.

"I am delighted," she said, holding the girl's hand, "to meet you. I have long wanted to study your type."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Jennie Warren, "and I have always wanted to get a close-up on yours. So, I'm sure we're going to have a pleasant evening."

Mrs. Hardy frowned, trying to remember where she had seen that phrase, "close-up," before, and, recalling a visit to the movies, smiled more graciously than ever. "And now that you have seen me," she

went on, as they settled themselves around the table, "I trust you feel no embarrassment at meeting me."

"Not the slightest," replied the girl readily; "how do you feel now that you have inspected me?"

Mrs. Hardy gasped. There were stenographers and stenographers, she knew; there was a large class who would never need "saving" from employers like Fred Wills; but those who didn't looked down upon those who did; she knew, and this girl must have known, what any one, even her own kind, would think of a girl who accepted an invitation to dine with her boss. And here she was actually asking her, Minnie Hardy, the properest young matron in New York, for her opinion of her conduct. She was excessively frank, if not brazen. But Minnie did not forget her duty to her sex.

She lowered her voice and gazed quietly, sadly, but kindly at the girl. "We will talk about that later," she said in a low tone.

Miss Jennie Warren grinned from ear to ear—or as nearly so as her rosebud mouth would permit.

The dinner progressed merrily as far as Fred and Jennie were concerned, and presently Harry forgot his apprehensions, and by omitting to glance at his wife, managed to have a pleasant time too.

Not that Minnie was having an unpleasant time. She was at last getting a glimpse into the kind of life she had heard of and never known. If she did gasp when Jennie spoke familiarly to Fred, and ordered him about as if she owned him, and made nonchalant references to past dinners; and if Fred did call her "dear," and an occasional *sotto voce* "darling," and otherwise plainly indicated that things had gone too far—far too far with him and his paid underling, Minnie relished all the more her rôle of reformer and savior. It was late, but not too late—she would save both of them—and she would save them that night.

When Fred leaned back and thrust his hand into his right-hand pocket for funds wherewith to pay the dinner check, Minnie leaned forward and said firmly, "We will go to our house after dinner. I want to take you both home with me for a little while."

She put this in the form of a command, because she feared that naturally enough Fred would try to prevent her seeing his little lady love alone, but to her astonishment he accepted the command with delight—told her she was "a regular fellow," and promptly put Miss Jennie Warren into her evening wrap.

Miss Jennie did not exhibit such keen delight at the invitation—in fact she neither bothered to accept nor decline—simply went out with the others and settled herself in the most comfortable corner of Minnie's limousine before the latter could get to it.

This annoyed Minnie at first, but gave her an opportunity she had wanted—to sit beside Harry and there to issue her instructions.

"I shall talk to her first," she whispered. "When we reach home I shall leave you and Fred to smoke in the library and I shall take the girl to my room.

"Oh, Lord!" grumbled Harry, "you're not going to spoil a pleasant evening with sermons?"

"I am going to prevent two lives which might be beautiful from being ugly," she replied firmly.

Alone in her boudoir, Minnie was very tender and sweet to Jennie Warren. It could not be said that Jennie responded very promptly—in fact, throughout the interview she preserved a kind of attitude of looking at Minnie through space, of judging her, sizing her up, as Harry would have put it.

In fact, before they had progressed very far, Minnie began to realize this herself.

"I am not," she said gently, seeking to overcome any lack of confidence on Jennie's part—"I am not a busybody. I have never rushed in where angels fear to tread; but, oh, my dear, I am older than you—"

"About two years," interrupted Jennie.

"Years do not actually count," Minnie hurried on; "my experience is far, far greater than yours."

"With afternoon teas, dancing men, and cotillions, yes," conceded Jennie.

Minnie flushed slightly, but she held on

to her temper. "I am," she said with dignity, "considered a woman of the world."

Jennie leaned forward, straightened the bow on her slipper, and laughed lightly.

Still Minnie held on to herself.

"My dear," she protested, "believe me, I am speaking as one girl to another, then, what good can come of accepting such attentions from your millionaire employer?"

"I don't know," replied Jennie easily.

"You don't know," Minnie seized even upon this slight concession from her opponent—"let me tell you. Don't you read?"

Jennie nodded; "But not the kind of books you read," she said. "Instead of my heroines being work-girls who are led astray, they're always young married women like you who fall for the dark eyes of designing young bachelors."

Minnie actually felt annoyed.

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed. "The idea of putting such ideas in the heads of girls like you."

"Isn't it awful?" queried Jennie in mock regret.

"Now," said Minnie, "every one knows of the temptations that beset the girl all alone all day with her employer."

"Sure," agreed Jennie, "all alone except for the office-boy and the bill-clerk, and the ubiquitous bill-collector, and book-agent, and time-wasters. Sure, it often happens that a girl is alone for at least half a minute a day—with her employer—and then he's as likely as not to waste that by dictating a letter."

"Of course," Minnie hurried on, "I am sure that Mr. Wills is a gentleman."

"Oh, is he?" queried Jennie.

"Have—have you reason to believe otherwise?" Minnie courageously inquired.

Jennie shrugged her shoulders.

"You see I never had a gentleman described to me," she said. "How can I tell?"

"Well"—Minnie's face flushed, but she went on bravely; this girl was a bit callous, and she saw that her task was going to be harder than she had reckoned; she must match the girl's boldness with her own—"well, for instance, has Mr. Wills invited you out often?"

"Oh, yes; dozens of times."

"And you've gone?"

"Nearly every time."

"Has—has he ever kissed you on such occasions?"

Jennie smiled reminiscently.

"Often," she replied promptly.

Minnie gasped. "My, dear! And have you told your mother?"

Jennie nodded.

"And yet she lets you go out with him again? What is she thinking of?"

"I don't know, but if it's important I'll call her up and ask." Jennie put her hand out toward the telephone.

Minnie stopped her, quite angry now.

"Miss Warren," she said, "I am sure you regard my interference in your affairs as a joke. Some day, when you have lived to regret your present conduct you will be sorry that you have treated my well-meant efforts in your behalf in this light way. But I shall say no more, except to give you a final warning. Mr. Wills will never, never marry you now."

Jennie rose, nodding. "I don't expect him to," she said lightly. "May I go now?"

Minnie walked to the door with her, unable to speak.

When she reached the library she approached Fred instantly.

"I would like to see you for a few minutes," she said in an undertone.

Fred caught the look in her eye—he glanced from her to Jennie—the latter was smiling broadly, but the way she was looking at Minnie did not indicate any great fondness for Minnie.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated in a worried tone.

Minnie turned toward the door, and Fred started to follow her. But Jennie stopped them both.

"Oh, Fred!" she exclaimed, "you haven't time for any midnight conferences with Mrs. Hardy—don't you remember you promised to show me your apartment tonight?"

"What!" Fred stopped short and stared at her. Minnie stopped also, biting her lips. The boldness of the girl was past belief.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Jennie; "don't you remember? Of course I know I ought not to have mentioned that in front of Mrs. Hardy, she's so proper. Why, Fred, she's so proper she thinks you ought to marry me—just because I've accepted a few of your attentions. Although"—she went on, frowning now—"she says you never will, because you're a regular villain out of the movies. I'm sorry you didn't introduce me to her before—before it was too late."

Again Minnie gasped—this time, in fact, she put out her hand and held on to the back of a chair for support. The girl's effrontery was past all belief. Surely she would disgust even Fred, who did, indeed, seem quite crazy about her. She looked toward him and her husband. The latter was making wild signs to Fred, which he was calmly ignoring.

On Fred's face a smile closely resembling that of Jennie's had appeared. He turned to her and held out his arm.

"Come on, you little vampire," he said, "I did promise to show you my apartment, and I'm glad you reminded me of it. As for marrying you, I can't help what my good friend Mrs. Hardy thinks of my conduct, but I never will—now. Good night, everybody."

He and the girl were gone.

Minnie stared after them blankly, then collapsed upon a chair. It was several minutes before she could speak, and then she had no opportunity.

For Harry was speaking, with wrath in his voice and in his eyes.

"Good Heavens, Minnie!" he cried, "didn't that little vixen tell you that they are married already?"

"Married!" she echoed weakly.

"Several weeks ago"—Harry went on—"they kept it a secret until Fred got his money—knew his mater would object. And Fred likes us enough to want us to be the first to know about it—he thought she was telling you up-stairs, just the same as he was telling me down here."

"Then I—" began Minnie, a slow wave of shame sweeping over her as she recalled her "advice" to the poor little working-girl!

"You feared the worst, as you always do," began Harry, "and now we've lost a good friend—" The phone interrupted.

"Hello, hello!" came a laughing voice at the other end of the wire, "may I speak to dear Mrs. Hardy?"

"Here," cried Harry, holding out the receiver to his crushed wife—he hadn't recognized the voice.

But Minnie did—instantly—it belonged to the brazen Jennie.

"I've been thinking over what you said," she began in mock humility, "and I've decided to marry Fred to-night."

Minnie rose to the occasion. "I am glad to hear it," she said; "tell Fred I congratulate him—and as for you, well, if you'll come to tea with me to-morrow I'll tell you what I think of you, you little imp. I know all."

"I'm brave," laughed the voice, "I'll come."

Minnie hung up the receiver. She turned thoughtfully to her husband.

"I guess," she said slowly, "that I will advise Bessie to take a business course. She's been out two seasons, now, and hasn't had a proposal."

LOVE

BY BESSIE O'BYRNE

THE love that will soonest decay,
The love that is surest to die,
The love that will soon fly away,
Is the love
That is told by a sigh.

The love that is surest to last,
The love that a woman's heart needs,
The love that will ever be fast,
Is the love
That is spoken in deeds.

Ashes to Ashes

by Isabel Ostrander

Author of "Twenty-Six Clues," "Suspense," "Between Heaven and Earth," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

NORMAN STORM, moving in good society, and holding a position in a large trust company, but almost at the end of his financial resources, thought that his wife, Leila, was involved in an affair with Dick Brewster, a neighbor in their suburban colony of Greenlea. When he returned home unexpectedly one night and found Brewster kissing Leila's hand, he was sure of her guilt. The fact was that Brewster was thanking Leila for bringing together himself and his wife, from whom he had been estranged. After Brewster had left, Storm accused Leila of unfaithfulness, and during a stormy scene struck her with a golf club. The blow killed her.

He felt no grief nor remorse—she had deceived him! He destroyed every evidence of the crime, and went to his room. The body was found by a servant the next morning and the authorities summoned. After an examination that brought out the fact that Leila had been subject to fainting spells, they decided that death had been caused by her falling accidentally and striking her head on the fender of the fireplace. No suspicion attached to Storm—he had won.

Storm had sent for George Holworthy, their closest friend, as soon as Leila's body was found, and George stayed with him until after the funeral. The Brewsters called and told Storm of his wife's efforts to bring them together. Realizing that she had been innocent, Storm broke down, but he did not betray himself. His one thought was to live as if nothing had happened until he could make arrangements to get away from old scenes and friends.

When he returned to business Storm found that his associates had no suspicion as to the manner of Leila's death, but the silent house and its memories got on his nerves, and he closed it and took an apartment in town. He also made arrangements with Foulkes, his and Leila's attorney, to turn his securities, fifty thousand dollars' worth, into cash.

In a restaurant one night, Millard, a member of the Greenlea colony, introduced Storm to a Frenchman, du Chainat, who was trying to raise sixty thousand dollars, and who promised large profits. Du Chainat said that a well-known financier was interested in the proposition; but after looking du Chainat up, Storm phoned him, offering to let him have the money. Du Chainat told him that he would phone his decision at six o'clock that afternoon.

CHAPTER XXI.

M. DU CHAINAT.

PROMPTLY at six that evening the telephone in Storm's apartment shrilled, and it had scarcely ceased vibrating when he sprang to it and caught up the receiver.

He uttered a quick monosyllabic assent to some evident query, listened intently for a minute and then threw back his head in a smile of elation. The next instant he was speaking calmly, quietly.

"Too small a proposition for him to tackle, eh?" he observed. "Well, I'm not a magnate, M. Du Chainat, but I would like to talk it over with you. How about dining with me in an hour at the Rochefoucauld, where we met last night? Bring along your papers, and we can come back here later and go into the details. Very good, at seven."

His luck was holding. Old Whitmarsh had turned the loan down as too petty a transaction to interest him. The chance was his now, make or break. But pshaw!

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for September 27.

he couldn't lose; not if Du Chainat's securities were all right. Past failures had made him skeptical, but now fortune had seemingly changed. A hundred and twenty thousand!

He whistled exultantly as he changed from one somber suit of mourning to another, and only paused when a casual glance in the mirror brought home to him with a shock the incongruity between his expression and attire. He threw back his shoulders defiantly.

"The past is dead!" he muttered. "Three months, and I shall be free to forget."

M. du Chainat met him in the hotel lobby and greeted him with undiminished enthusiasm.

"I am delighted, *monsieur*, that you find yourself interested," he remarked, after their order had been given. "Since I telephoned to you an hour ago I have received yet another offer to take up the loan, this from an associate of M. Whitmarsh, whom he must have consulted; a M. Nicholas Langhorne. You perhaps have heard of him?"

Storm nodded.

"I know him," he said briefly, forbearing to add that the gentleman in question was the president of the trust company which he ornamented with his presence. To get ahead of old Langhorne! That would be gratification enough were the profits cut to a minimum.

"I have replied to him that the affair is already under consideration," M. du Chainat poised a fragment of *hors d'œuvre* gracefully upon his fork, "but should you not, after examining the documents I have brought, desire to close, *monsieur*, I will see him to-morrow."

"'To-morrow'!" Storm echoed in dismay. "I should like a little longer time than that in which to decide. It may take me some days to convert my capital into cash, and there are other contingencies—"

"But *monsieur* forgets that to me time is of paramount importance." The Frenchman's face had clouded. "It is for that we pay one hundred per cent interest in three months. When I have acquired the loan I do not even wait for the ship which takes me back; I cable to my *beau-père* the money, that the work may start without an hour's delay.

"You comprehend, *monsieur*, how urgent is our need by the extent of our sacrifice. I shall have an inheritance from my uncle soon, and I shall aid Pere Peronneau in paying off the government loan for which he is responsible when he repays with it the debt we incur here. There is the sentiment as well as the business, as I told you last night, *monsieur*. If you could but see the *beau-père*—"

He drew a simple but graphic word-picture of the old manufacturer, but his listener was distrait. Could he get the fifty thousand from Foulkes at such short order, to say nothing of arranging the mortgage on the Greenlea house? M. du Chainat's haste seemed plausible enough, and then there was Langhorne only too ready to snap up the prize.

By Heavens, if the Frenchman's security looked good to him, he would raise the money, come what might!

And the security did look more than good, when later they repaired to his rooms and M. du Chainat produced his sheaf of multitudinous documents. There were the unassailable correspondence on the letter-heads of the consulate, Henri Peronneau's authorization of his son-in-law, Maurice Pierre du Chainat as his agent, duly signed and attested to by the notary of Lille, a deed formally making over to the lender of three hundred thousand francs—the space for whose name was left significantly blank—the government loan of six hundred thousand in its entirety, and lastly a formidable-appearing document of the French government itself announcing the grant of the loan.

"For further evidence of our good faith," M. du Chainat drew a second packet of papers from his pocket. "I have here a deed to the factory itself which can be held as security. As you can see from this photograph, *monsieur*, the factory is a mere shell now, but a stout and solid shell, and the land upon which it stands is worth more than the sum we require.

"Our government has not asked this security of us, but accepted instead some undeveloped coal properties to the south. Here are the documents attesting to that

and also those which prove the factory to be the property of M. Peronneau, free of lien or mortgage."

They talked until far into the night, and when the Frenchman at length took his departure he bore with him Storm's agreement to advance the loan.

The morning brought no breath of misgiving, save anxiety lest he should fail in his efforts to secure the cash in the space of the twenty-four hours specified by Du Chainat. The trust company would assume the mortgage on the Greenlea house, he knew, and waive technicalities to give him the ten thousand at once, but there remained Foulkes to be managed, and if the old rascal knew that haste was imperative to the transaction he would balk it in sheer perversity.

On one point Storm was determined: he would not take Foulkes into his confidence, nor any one.

He had a stormy session with the old attorney, adjourned at noon only to be renewed with more wordy violence an hour later, but in the end Storm emerged triumphant, with a certified check for fifty thousand dollars and Foulkes's dismal prophecies ringing in his ears. The mortgage on the house was, as he had anticipated, a simple matter to arrange, and on the following morning he handed over to M. du Chainat the sixty thousand dollars which were to return to him twofold.

The momentous transaction concluded, he repaired to his desk at the trust company, gloating over the unconscious bald head of Nicholas Langhorne. He had put one over on him, beaten that conservative financier by a matter of hours. Du Chainat had shown him Langhorne's letter, and he read between the lines of the latter's eagerness to grasp the coveted opportunity which he had himself placed within Storm's reach by taking up the mortgage. How he would writhe if he knew who had forestalled him, just as he and the rest would writhe if they realized the enormity of that other affair which he had put over on all the world.

They would never learn the truth about Leila's death; that was buried forever. But he would give much to tell Langhorne how he had outwitted him and watch the old fox's face. Perhaps he would tell him some day, the day on which his six hundred thousand francs came, and he resigned from the trust company.

George Holworthy found him a strange companion for the rest of the week. The faithful friend could not understand his moods for Storm, never easily comprehended by the other's slow-moving brain, seemed all at once to develop a complexity which utterly baffled him.

Storm himself found it difficult to preserve a calm and resigned demeanor to mask his thoughts, which seethed with plans for the future. When haunting memories came unbidden he thrust them fiercely aside, smothered them beneath the exultation of having escaped the lax hands of justice.

"Upon my soul, Norman, I don't know what to make of you!" George complained one evening as they strolled up the Drive. "If you were a woman, I'd swear you were hysterical."

Storm halted, glad of the semi-obscurity of the trees which tempered the searching street lights.

"You're crazy!" he retorted.

"No, I'm not," insisted George in serious refutation. "You're down in the dumps one minute and all excited the next. You haven't been speculating again?"

"Good Lord, no!" Storm breathed more freely. He must be careful. If old George thought his manner odd, how would it impress others? "I'm through with all that sort of thing."

"Well, I didn't know," the other said lamely. "There's a streak of recklessness in you, and when you get in one of those don't-give-a-hang moods of yours you are apt to pull off some fool stunt."

"My dear George!" Storm's tone was pained. "I've been through enough, God knows, in the last few weeks to sober me down."

"But it hasn't!" George persevered. "You seem hardened, defiant, just in a frame of mind to do something desperate. I tell you frankly I've been worried about you these days."

Storm shrugged ironically.

"Sorry I can't set your mind at rest," he replied. "I don't seem to be taking what's

come to me according to your notions. First, you are disappointed because I don't rant around and tear my hair, and now you accuse me of hysteria."

"That's it; that's what I don't like!" exclaimed George. "That callousness; it isn't natural; it isn't you! You're putting it on because your trouble has made you defiant, bitter. I know you, Norman, you can't fool me; I'm only trying to help you, to keep you from doing anything you will have cause to regret."

"Don't you worry," Storm reassured him, the while his face twitched with mirth. George knew him, did he? He couldn't fool him. He checked an impulse to laugh aloud and added quietly: "I'm not in such a desperate mood as you imagine, old man; I can't seem to settle down to the new order of things just yet, that's the trouble, but I've no intention of going to the dogs, financially or any other way. I'll get a grip on myself soon."

CHAPTER XXII.

LUCK.

BUT as the days passed Storm did not find it so easy to control himself. He had gained complete ascendancy over the faint twinges of conscience which assailed him now with less and less frequency, but with the assurance of absolute safety came a dangerous, almost insane tendency to test that safety. Although he had no desire to revisit the scene of Leila's death, and shrank from any reference to her, the subject of crime in general began to exert an inordinate fascination for him, and with it his pride in his own achievement increased.

He eagerly awaited the news of Du Chainat's arrival in France, and his occasional glimpses of President Langhorne filled him with renewed complacency. He would most assuredly tell him about getting in ahead on that little deal one of these days.

The temptation became overwhelming one morning after a brief interview with his august superior during which the latter had called him to account, courteously but firmly for a trifling dereliction. The sting rankled and at the door he turned, the impulse to retaliate mastering him.

"Oh, Mr. Langhorne, you've heard of a man named Du Chainat, I believe?"

The president looked up in surprise at his subordinate's presumption.

"Du Chainat? Can't say I have," he responded shortly.

Storm smiled and raised his eyebrows in polite incredulity.

"The agent in that little deal Whitmarsh was considering only last week—a loan for the reconstruction of a French factory."

"I am not in Mr. Whitmarsh's confidence, Mr. Storm." President Langhorne darted a keen glance at the other and added: "May I ask why you assume that I know anything of this particular affair?"

"I understand that you were interested in it." Storm paused expectantly, but the president shook his head.

"Never heard of it," he asseverated. "You've been misinformed, Mr. Storm. The man you mention is absolutely unknown to me."

He turned pointedly to his desk and Storm withdrew, still smiling covertly. The old fox wouldn't admit that he had tried to get in on the game, of course, now that some one else had beaten him to it. Wait until he learned who that some one was! The joke was so good that it would keep a little longer, especially since Storm had given him something to puzzle over. He would have been a fool to give it away now; old Langhorne could make it infernally unpleasant for him around the office if he chose.

The three months stretched interminably before him, and George, with doglike fidelity, seemed determined to stick close and make it as irksome as he could. God, if only he were free from them all!

Storm had left his own car locked in the garage at Greenlea, but on an impulse he hired another when his work was finished for the afternoon and had himself driven out to a shore resort for dinner. The season had not yet opened, and the place was semi-deserted, yet the isolation fitted in with his mood. George would in all probability put in an appearance at the apartment that evening and to avoid him Storm lingered de-

liberately over his meal and ordered the chauffeur to take the longest way home.

He would not admit even to himself that the sudden aversion to the companionship of the man he had for so long regarded with amused, half-condescending tolerance had sprung from the fact that George unconsciously brought to his mind the aspects of his crime which he was most determined to put behind him. George was a constant reminder of the years which must be forgotten, his grief at the loss of the woman who had given him a valued friendship was a constant reproach.

How easy it had been to blind him to the truth! How easy it had been to blind everybody! Why, a man with sufficient intelligence could pull off almost anything in this world and get away with it if he had only enough nerve and self-control.

Storm was still smiling at the thought as he entered his apartment-house long after ten o'clock and found George sitting patiently in the hall, his near-sighted eyes glued to a newspaper.

"I waited for you," the latter explained, happily oblivious to the coolness of his reception. "Knew you wouldn't be late, and I wanted a little talk with you."

"Come on in," Storm invited wearily, opening the door and switching on the lights. "I ran out of town for a breath of clean air. The cigars are in that humidor; help yourself."

George settled himself comfortably in a huge leather chair and smoked in silence for a space, while Storm moved restlessly about the room.

"I came," remarked the visitor at length, "to ask you what you know about Millard's nephew. He applied to us for a job, and the only thing open is a rather responsible position."

"Don't know anything about him," snapped his host. "He held some sort of minor clerical position in Washington during the war. Weak chest and the only-son-of-his-mother stuff kept him from active service. He's a likable enough chap, plays good golf—"

George shook his head.

"Hardly material to the point," he observed. "I want to know whether he's dependable or not; conscientious and steady, not given up to these quick-rich ideas that get so many young fellows. I tell you we can't be too careful nowadays."

Storm laughed shortly.

"My dear George, I wouldn't give you an opinion on any man's honesty. Given the incentive and the opportunity, how do we know where any one gets off?"

"Oh, come, Norman!" George's tone was scandalized. "That's a pretty broad assertion. We're not all potential criminals."

"No?" Storm paused to light a cigar. "Well, if we're not you must admit that the opportunities lie around thick enough. The wonder of it is that there isn't more crookedness going on."

"The example of what happens to the fellow who has tried it is a deterrent, I imagine," George observed sententiously. "When he's caught—"

"And when *is* he caught except through his own negligence and loss of nerve?" demanded Storm, the train of thought which had occupied his mind an hour before recurring to him. "Certainly it isn't through the extraordinary ability of society at large to track him down. A man gives himself away; he is safe until he makes a mistake."

"Then every crook in the world must be a bungler, for they're all caught, sooner or later," George retorted. "The cleverest ones overreach themselves in time.

"Take this fellow Jan Mertens, or whatever his real name is. To be sure, he hasn't been caught yet, but his game is up; he tried it once too often."

"Mertens?" Storm repeated absently, his mind fixed upon his own argument.

"Haven't you looked at the evening papers?" asked George. "He's been working an old con game with a new twist and getting the suckers for anywhere from five to fifty thousand. Worked Boston and Philadelphia before he came here, and got away with a tremendous haul. They only got the goods on him to-day, but he had skipped.

"It was a clever stunt, too; he played upon a combination of sympathy and cupidity in his victims that only failed when he tackled a wise one. His line was getting loans on forged securities for rebuilding

demolished property in France and Belgium."

"What?"

Storm was not conscious that he had spoken, that he had turned and was staring at his visitor with wild eyes. He only knew that George's solid, compact figure was wavering oddly and his voice seemed to come from far away.

"He rather upsets your theory, Norman," George continued complacently, ignorant of the effect of his disclosure. "He wasn't giving himself away by a long shot, and his paraphernalia was certainly elaborate and imposing enough in all conscience.

"In Boston he posed as Jan Mertens, a Belgian, looking for a loan to rebuild the family château, and giving forged Congo properties as security. It worked so well that when he came here he tried to improve on it, and overreached himself, as I contended a few minutes ago.

"A lot of foreigners are over here now trying to negotiate perfectly legitimate loans on the same order, but with *bona fide* securities to offer, and he fell in with one of them who was vouched for at the French consulate here, a citizen of Lille named Du Chainat."

Storm drew a long breath.

"But this—this Du Chainat is all right, you say?" he stammered. "His proposition was legitimate?"

"Absolutely. He must have taken this Mertens into his confidence, shown him his papers and left them where the crook could get at them, for Mertens forged a duplicate set—they found stacks of counterfeit government deeds and grants, both Belgian and French, in his room to-day, together with official letter-heads from the consulates—and then when Du Chainat returned to France he impersonated him. Du Chainat had put through his loan all right with Whitmarsh."

"When"—Storm moistened his dry lips—"when did this Du Chainat leave America?"

"Three weeks ago, according to the paper. The impostor was only exposed through a woman, too; a rich widow whom he approached yesterday with his proposition, but he didn't take into consideration the fact that she had lived abroad. As it happened, she knew the Du Chainat family in Lille, but by the time she made up her mind to risk notoriety and inform the police of the attempted swindle the bird had flown."

He paused, but Storm had heard only the first three words of his utterance: "Three weeks ago"! And only a week had passed since he handed to the bogus Du Chainat every cent he had in the world. It couldn't be true. There must be some hideous mistake.

"Here, it's all in the paper. I was reading about it while I waited for you. Want to see it?"

George picked up the newspaper from the table where he had dropped it on entering, and Storm seized it, hoping blindly, doggedly against all hope. His luck could not have deserted him. Fate would not play him such a ghastly trick now.

But the head-lines stared at him in uncompromising type, and the article itself left no room for doubt. He had been despoiled of his only means of freedom. Penniless, he was chained forever to the environs of the past, to the friends who had been Leila's, the life of which she had been a part. The curse was upon him, and he might not even flee from the memories which dogged him. He was bound hand and foot, held fast.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MIRAGE.

STORM realized later when the dawn brought coherency of thought that it was blind instinct alone, not conscious will, which had enabled him to shield the death-blow that had been given him from George Holworthy's peering eyes. The crumbling of his air castles had left him stunned, and he remembered nothing of the rest of the interview save that George had moralized interminably and in leaving at last had harked back to the Millard boy. Surely he would not have droned on of trivialities had he gleaned an inkling of the tumult in his host's brain.

Until the morning light stole in at the

windows Storm paced the floor in a frenzy of consternation. He had one slender hope; that the false Du Chainat would be apprehended. If he appeared against the scoundrel or entered a complaint the resultant revelation of how easily he had been fleeced would be a bitter pill to swallow. Old Langhorne would recall that conversation of the previous day, and it would be his turn to smile, while Foulkes and George would descend upon him with galling criticism and reproach.

He could endure it all, however, if only it would mean the recovery of his money, or even a portion of it. As his hope of getting away vanished, the absolute need of such escape grew in his thoughts until it assumed the proportions of an obsession. He felt as if something he could not name were tightening about him slowly, but inexorably, and he struggled wildly to free himself from the invisible fetters.

If he had to stay on at the trust company, suffer George's continual presence, run the daily gantlet of mingled sympathy and curiosity of his friends he should go mad. Other men lived down tragedies, went on in the same old rut until the end of time, but he could not.

And then all at once the truth burst upon him. If Leila had died a natural death, as the world supposed; if she had been taken from him in the high tide of their love and happiness, he might have gone on with existence again in time with no thought of cutting himself adrift from the past. It was the secret knowledge of his guilt which was driving him forth, which rendered unendurable all the familiar things of his every-day life.

Yet he must endure them. Unless the bogus Du Chainat were caught there was no way out for him.

Unconscious of irony, his breast swelled with virtuous indignation at thought of the swindler, and dire were the anathemas he heaped upon the departed one. He searched the papers feverishly, made what inquiries he dared without drawing undue attention to himself, and haunted the Belterre grill for news, but all to no avail, and as day succeeded day he developed a savage moroseness which rebuffed even George's overtures.

He would take no one into his confidence; there would be time enough for admitting that he had played the fool when the miscreant were caught. If he were not, Storm determined to accept the inevitable in silence, but day by day the obsession of flight increased. Somehow, at any price, he must get away.

The papers still played up the pseudo Du Chainat as further exploits of that wily adventurer were brought to light, and the press gleefully baited the police for their inability to discover whither he had flown. The flickering hope that he would be apprehended died slowly in Storm's breast, and the blankness of despair settled upon him.

One morning Nicholas Langhorne sent for him, and before the president spoke Storm sensed a subtle difference in his manner. The pompous, official attitude seemed to have been laid aside, and for once a warmly personal note crept into his voice.

"Sit down, Storm, I want to have a little talk with you."

The other seated himself and waited, but Langhorne seemed in no hurry to begin. He took off his glasses, wiped them, replaced them, and then sat meditatively fingering a pen. At last he threw it aside and turned abruptly to face his subordinate.

"Storm, I knew your father well. We both started here away down on the lowest rung of the ladder, and, although he soon branched out into a wider, less conservative field, we never allowed our friendship to flag. It was on his account that we took you on, and because of his memory you were given preference over more experienced men."

He paused and Storm stiffened, but he replied warily:

"I am aware of that, Mr. Langhorne. I hope that I have executed my duties—"

Langhorne waved him to silence.

"I have no complaint to make. I sent for you because my personal interest in you as the son of my old friend has caused me a certain amount of disquietude. When you came to me a fortnight ago and requested that I arrange an immediate mortgage on your property I waived the usual procedure and complied at once. It was not my prov-

ince to question your need or use of the money, although I knew of your previous unfortunate ventures, and I hoped that you had not again been ill-advised.

"A week later—ten days ago, to be exact—you came to me and mentioned a person named Du Chainat, whom you said had been in negotiation with Mr. Whitmarsh. This Du Chainat, or rather the man impersonating him, has been exposed as a swindler on a rather large scale. I trust that you yourself did not fall a victim to him?"

Storm's eyes flashed, but he held himself rigidly in control. Bleat to this fathead and give him an opportunity to gloat? He would see him damned first!

"Hardly, Mr. Langhorne." He allowed the ghost of a smile to lift the corners of his mouth. "The investment I had in mind was of quite another sort."

Langhorne frowned doubtfully.

"You appeared to take it for granted that I knew this Du Chainat. May I ask what your motive was in mentioning him to me?"

Storm hesitated and then replied with seeming candor:

"Well, if you want the truth, Mr. Langhorne, I—er—I believed that you yourself were one of the many victims he intended to fleece."

"I, sir?" The president stared.

"Yes. I met this man in the Rochefoucauld grill one night, and he worked his usual game; told me of the loan he was attempting to negotiate, and said Whitmarsh had turned it down because it wasn't a big enough proposition for him. Du Chainat, as he called himself, showed me your letter, and as I had reason to distrust him I ventured to mention the matter to you, thinking that I might be of service in warning you of the whispers I had heard against him."

"My letter?" Langhorne gripped the arms of his chair. "I never wrote a letter to the man in my life!"

"When you denied having heard of him," Storm continued, unmoved by the other's expostulation, "I naturally concluded that you resented my intrusion into your private affairs, and said nothing more. The man was exposed in the evening papers that very night, as I remember."

"You saw a letter purporting to have been written by me?" the president demanded.

"I would have been willing to swear to your signature, Mr. Langhorne," replied Storm.

"Forgery!" The clenched hand came down upon his desk. "That signature was forged! I'll look into this when the fellow is caught. His effrontery is astounding! What was the gist of this letter, Storm?"

"An intimation that you would advance the loan," he responded dully. There was no mistaking now the sincerity of the other's indignation. "The letter was a forgery, of course, as you say, but it was a remarkably clever one. The signature was almost identical in every detail with yours."

"I wish you had told me of this before," the president fumed. "This may cause a vast amount of trouble. However, I am glad to be assured that you were not victimized by this person. By the way, this is not my custom—in fact, it is emphatically against my rule, especially where officers of the company are concerned—but I shall be glad to make an exception in your case, Storm. I may be able to give you a little advance information, strictly confidential, you understand, on a certain investment later, if you are looking for one."

"Thank you, Mr. Langhorne. I'm not thinking of making any just now." He smiled again, reading the other's motive, and added pointedly: "I have mentioned the Du Chainat letter to no one else, of course; nor shall I do so."

The president flushed, but dismissed him with forced cordiality, and Storm returned to his own sanctum in a bitter mood. Even the small satisfaction of believing that Langhorne, too, had fallen for the alluring proposition was denied him.

At noon, as he left the trust company building to go to the luncheon club of which he was a member, he collided with Millard.

"Hello, there! Just coming in to see you." The little man's usually apoplectic face was pale, and his small, beady eyes shifted nervously beneath Storm's gaze. "Where are you off to?"

"Lunch," replied the other briefly. Confound the little golf hound! It was he who got him into the Du Chainat affair!

"Then have it with me, do," Millard urged. "I want to talk to you. Let's run into Peppini's, where we can be quiet."

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOST!

STORM was on the point of refusal, but something in the other's manner made him change his mind.

"If you like." He turned, and Millard fell into step beside him. "How's the golf coming along?"

"Hang golf!" Millard exploded. "I've had other things on my mind, Storm, old chap. I've been in the very devil of a hole, and Mrs. M.—well, you know what she is when she has got anything on me. I tell you I haven't had a minute's peace."

"What's the trouble?" Storm asked perfunctorily as they entered the little restaurant and made for a corner table. Millard did not reply until the waiter had taken their order and departed. Then he leaned confidentially across the table.

"It's all about that scoundrel, Du Chainat," he began. "You remember him; chap I introduced to you in the Rochefoucauld. By Jove, I owe you an apology for that."

"Not at all." A hidden thought made Storm's lips curl in grim humor. "We are all of us apt to be mistaken in the people we think we know."

"That's what I say," corroborated Millard eagerly. "How're you going to tell a crook nowadays? The fellow took me in absolutely. And now, to hear Mrs. M. talk, you would think I had been in league with him."

"You tried to get her to go into one of his schemes, didn't you?" Storm asked.

The other nodded gloomily.

"I did, and I shall never be permitted to hear the last of it," he observed. "That isn't what is worrying me, though. You see, I introduced him around pretty generally, and if any of my friends fell for his graft I should feel personally responsible. There you are, for instance; that's what I wanted to see you about. Storm, I hope to the Lord that you didn't—"

"Not by a damn sight!" Storm retorted savagely. Was he to go through a repetition of the scene with Langhorne? "What do you take me for? I'm not looking to line the pockets of every adventurer that comes along."

Millard winced.

"All right, old chap, only I was anxious. You seemed interested that night."

"I was, in the man himself; he was a new type to me, but I don't mind telling you that I didn't trust him." Storm smiled patronizingly. "I don't wonder his little proposition looked good to you. It did to me; too good.

"Money isn't so scarce for a legitimate deal that a man has to offer one hundred per cent profit in three months. You would have realized that yourself if you had stopped to think. The trouble with you was that the man's personality blinded you, Millard. I'll admit that he was a plausible rascal, but if any one had been fool enough to fall for his game they deserved what was coming to them."

"I suppose so," Millard mumbled shamefacedly. "Anyhow, they've got him now."

"What!" Storm sat back in his chair.

"Fact. I've just come from police headquarters," Millard nodded, visibly cheered by the impression his announcement had made. "It has been established beyond a doubt that he is on board the Alsace, *en route* for France. He'll be arrested the moment they reach Havre."

Storm's brain whirled, yet he strove mightily to command himself. Millard must not know, must not guess! Could it be that after all luck had not deserted him? Hope had died so utterly that he found it difficult to believe in this turn of fortune.

"How can they be sure?" he stammered. "There may be some mistake."

"Not a chance!" Millard, his equanimity restored, chattered on. "His movements have been traced from the moment he left the hotel until he walked up the gangplank, and they've got him dead to rights. Nervy of him to go back to France when he knew the government was out after him, wasn't it?

"I suppose he banked on that; that they would never dream he would dare to return. He's under a different name, of course, and all that, but the detectives have been in wireless communication with the captain of the Alsace, and there isn't a loophole of escape for him. He is cornered like a rat in a trap, and a good job, too."

The garrulity of his companion had given Storm time to collect himself. He must learn all that he could, and yet not seem too eager. He shrugged.

"His cleverness didn't get him far, did it?" he remarked with elaborate carelessness. "Let's see, the Alsace sailed three days ago, if I am not mistaken."

"Four," the other corrected him. "She won't reach port for another three days, however; traveling slow because of a report of some floating mines having been sighted in her path. It is just a wild rumor, of course; the sweepers gathered them in pretty thoroughly after the war.

"Don't know what they'll do about extraditing him for both countries want him badly. The main thing his victims want, I imagine, is to get their money back."

In this Storm concurred heartily, but in silence. After a pause he observed still in that detached, slightly bored tone:

"I fancy that won't be difficult if he has it with him."

"He has," Millard affirmed. "He must have cleared more than half a million, they tell me at headquarters, and they've proved that he didn't dispose of any of it here. Think of it! Half a million in cash! I wonder how he planned to explain it to the custom's officials on the other side?"

"He could stow it about him, I suppose," Storm responded absently. "If he had laid his plans carefully, and believed himself immune from suspicion, he would have no reason to anticipate a personal search. What on earth were you doing at headquarters?"

Millard squirmed uneasily.

"We-ell, when all this racket came out about Du Chainat, I felt that it was my duty to go down and tell all I knew about the fellow. In the course of justice, you know, old chap—"

"Precisely," Storm grinned. "You had rather identified yourself with him, hadn't you? I don't blame you for clearing your own skirts. It would be deucedly awkward for you if some of these people you presented him to—"

"Don't!" protested Millard. "How was I to know? He came to me with a forged letter purporting to be from Harry Wheeler, of Boston. I haven't seen Harry in years; wouldn't know his handwriting from Adam, but it looked all right. When I explained they understood the situation immediately at headquarters, I assure you."

"Don't 'assure' me, Millard; I know you!" Storm laughed, then his face sobered. "How is every one out at the country club?"

"Fine!" Millard waxed enthusiastic at the welcome change of topic. "We've taken on some more members; a new family or two from out Summit View way, and a most attractive widow. We talk of you a lot, Storm. You can't think what a gap your poor wife's death and your leaving us has made in the community. She was a wonderful little woman. You've no idea how she is missed."

"I think I have," Storm responded quietly.

"Oh, forgive me, old chap!" Millard flushed with honest contrition. "You more than any one else in the world must feel—but I'm glad to see that you are not taking it too hard."

Storm shot a quick glance at him. Was there a suggestion of criticism in the other's tone?

"One cannot always see," he said stiffly. "Sometimes a thing cuts too deep to show on the surface. But I can't talk about it even yet, Millard. I can't find words."

He couldn't. One thought alone was racing through his brain. His sixty thousand was safe, after all. It would be given into his hands again, and he would be free. Free from these hypocritical mouthings about a dead past, these constant reminders of the old life.

What a fool he had been to disclaim so emphatically to both Langhorne and Millard the fact that he had been victimized. How they would laugh at him when the truth came out! Well, let them! Unconsciously he squared his shoulders. He

would have the last laugh, sixty thousand of them! God, what a reprieve!

The afternoon passed in a glamour of renewed hope and revived plans. No more trifling with investments for him. When once the money was safely in his possession again he would throw up his position without a day's delay and catch the first steamer that sailed, no matter for what port she cleared. Anywhere! Any war-riddled, God forsaken corner of the globe would be heaven after this caged existence, surrounded by potential spies—and judges.

He was dimly aware that those with whom he came in contact that afternoon gazed at him curiously, but for once he was heedless of their possible criticism. The exalted mood lasted throughout his solitary dinner, and on returning to his apartments he ignored a painfully spelled message which Homachi had left requesting him to call up 'Mr. Holworti,' and paced the floor in utter abandonment to the joy which consumed him.

His days of slavery and imprisonment were over. Just at the moment when life had looked blackest to him and all hope was gone the shackles were struck from him and the way lay open to a new existence. Never again would he decry his luck! His capital, which shrank to insignificance before the wild idea of doubling it, now loomed large before him. It meant freedom, life!

He would go to the Far East. Many changes were bound to come there, many opportunities would arise in the general upheaval of worldwide readjustment to the new order of things, and the colorful atmosphere there had always held a fascination for him. Europe would do later, but at first he would lose himself and his memories in the glamour of a new world.

He halted, drawn from his reverie by the sound of confused, raucous shouting in the street, and realized vaguely that it had been going on for some little time. His apartment was on the ground floor, and he opened a window of the living-room and leaned out. The Drive seemed deserted, but on the block below he described two retreating figures with flat, white bundles beneath their arms.

Their shrill call came again to his ears.

"Wuxtry! Turr'ble disaster! All on board!"

A train-wreck, perhaps. Storm was withdrawing his head when from the second newsboy came the cry which struck terror to his heart.

"French steamer wrecked at sea! Awful loss of life!"

The Alsace! For a moment Storm stood as though petrified; then, turning, he dashed hatless from the apartment and out into the street. The newsboys raced toward him, and he tore a paper from the grasp of the foremost, thrust some silver into his hand and made for the apartment once more. He dared not halt beneath a street-lamp to read the staring head-lines; he must be secure from observation behind closed doors when he learned the truth.

It might be some other ship. It must be! Fate would not hold out this promise of a reprieve to him only to snatch it away just as his fingers closed upon it.

Again in his apartment he approached the lamp and spread the paper out with shaking fingers. There in bold, black letters, which seemed to dance mockingly before him, he read:

S. S. ALSACE LOST AT SEA.
NO SURVIVORS.

He tried to read on, but the letters ran together before his eyes, and he dashed the paper to the floor. The walls of his prison closed in upon him again stiflingly, relentlessly. The cup had once more been dashed from his lips and a groan of utter despair surged up from his heart, while the bitterness of death settled upon him.

CHAPTER XXV.

ENTER JACK HORTON.

MORNING found Storm, with a desperate, hunted look in his eyes, still pacing the floor, his heart sick within him. Why had that blundering ass Millard told him yesterday? Why had he been plunged in the madness of a fool's paradise for a few short hours, only to be drawn back into an existence that had become all the more unbearable by contrast?

He had contrived a sufficient measure of calmness in the late hours to read the amplification of the damning head-lines. The Alsace was supposed to have struck one of the floating mines of which she had been warned, and to have gone down with all on board.

No calls for help had been received by wireless, no survivors picked up. Another liner, westward bound, had run into a mass of wreckage on the course of the unfortunate ship; wreckage which denoted a fearful explosion, and fragments of which bore the name Alsace. That was all, but it was conclusive, damning to Storm's last hope.

The morning's news had little to add save a verification of the ocean tragedy in a message radioed from a second ship which had encountered the flotsam of the wreck. It was evident beyond peradventure of a doubt that the ill-fated Alsace had been blown to atoms and all on board must have perished instantly with her.

The article was followed by a copy of the passenger-list, together with brief obituaries of the more prominent of the wreck's victims, and beneath it was a terse paragraph which verified Millard's disclosure of the previous day. The notorious swindler, Jan Mertens, *alias* Maurice Du Chainat, was known to have been on board, and arrangements had been made to take him in custody upon the arrival of the ship at her destination; in fact, he had been placed nominally under arrest by the captain of the Alsace, as the last wireless message known to have been sent out from the unfortunate ship announced. It was feared that the bulk of the money netted by his gigantic swindle had gone down with him.

Storm left his breakfast untasted, deaf to the polite concern of Homachi, and took his miserable way to the trust company. God, how he loathed it all! The very sight of his desk, familiar through long years of usage, awoke anew the spirit of senseless, futile revolt, doubly futile now since the mirage of a different future had risen again only to be blotted out.

In a bitterness of soul which surpassed anything he had known in his blackest hours, Storm forced himself to go through with the dreary round, but the close of day found him desperate at bay. He could not go on. What was the use, anyway? What did the future hold for him now? Only memories which rose up in the silent hours to take him by the throat, from which there could be no escape while life lasted.

With the waning afternoon the sky had become overcast and twilight brought a gentle summer rain, through which Storm plodded doggedly. Food was distasteful, the thought of a restaurant was abhorent to him in his morose mood, and yet he shrank from hours of solitude in his apartment.

He was afraid of himself, afraid to think, and he longed desperately for the companionship of a fellow being; not George, nor any one connected with his life of the past ten years, but some one unconcerned in his affairs, some one with whom he could talk and forget.

He had seized upon the trivial excuse of a call at his cigarette importer's as an expedient to while away a half-hour. The tobacconist's shop was near the Grand Central Station, and as Storm passed among the arrivals who swarmed out of the edifice one face in the crowd caught his eye. Little of it was visible, for the man's hat was brought low over his eyes, the collar of his light summer overcoat turned up to meet it, and he tramped along beneath his umbrella without glancing to right or left.

Storm caught him impulsively by the arm.

"Jack!" he cried. "Where on earth did you drop from?"

The stranger shook him off unceremoniously.

"Your mistake, I'm afraid—" he mumbled.

"I beg your pardon." Storm stepped aside. "Sorry to have accosted you, sir. I thought that you were—yes, by Jove! You *are* Jack Horton! Don't you know me, old man?"

The stranger hesitated and then laughed with a hearty ring in his voice, which he checked instantly as he glanced cautiously about him.

"You've got me!" he exclaimed with subdued joviality. "I'm Jack, all right, and of course I know you, Norman, you old

scout. I meant to pass you up, though; fact is, I've got no business to stop off in town now. For the love of Pete, if you've got nothing to do, take me somewhere where we can get a bite and have a good old chin without a lot of folks giving us the once-over!"

Storm was mystified. This pal of his freshman year at college, whom Providence had thrust in his path this night of all nights when he needed human companionship, seemed to be in some strange predicament, but he did not stop to question. He was only too glad of the promised relief from solitude.

"Come along, I've got just the place. Lord, but it's good to see you! We'll go straight up to my own rooms. My man will have gone, but I can rustle up some grub and anything else you feel like having."

He gestured toward the line of waiting taxicabs, but Horton drew back.

"Where are you living?" he asked, with a trace of nervousness.

"Riverside Drive," Storm replied impatiently. "Come on, old man, your umbrella's leaking."

"Is there a subway station near you?"

"Yes, of course; only a block or two away. But what in the—"

"Never mind now. Let's go up that way," his friend proposed. "I'm not stuck on these taxis under the present circumstances. A lot of the fellows that drive them are crooks, and you never can tell—Me for the subway, and don't talk too much on the way up, Norman. This is serious business."

"All right," Storm acquiesced shortly. "But let me carry that bag, won't you? You've got enough with that umbrella and brief case."

"Not on your life!" responded Horton with emphasis. "I'll carry it myself. You lead the way, Norman."

Storm obeyed. He had known little of Horton in the past and nothing of how or where the years since their college days had been passed. Without having much in common they had traveled in the same crowd during the first term at the university and many had been the scrapes, engendered by Horton's reckless love of fun and Storm's rebellion against discipline, which they had shared.

Horton had been compelled to leave college at the end of the freshman year by his father's failure and gradually had dropped from the sight of his old classmates. In the first few years he had been heard of now and then in widely different parts of the country, employed in positions of minor responsibility, but of late no news had come and Storm had forgotten him completely until this passing glimpse of his face recalled old associations.

In the subway he studied his companion furtively. Horton's figure had grown heavier with the years, his face more full but healthily tanned, while the prominent jaw and clear steady eyes betokened added strength of character. His clothes were of good quality but obviously ready made and the bluff heartiness of his manner suggested an association with men of a rougher caliber than Storm himself counted among his friends.

Here was a man who had mastered circumstances, not permitted himself to be enslaved by them! Storm wondered what the other would do in his place. At least he would not allow penury to hold him chained to an existence which had become unendurable! Then he dismissed the idea with a shrug. Horton could never stand in his place, he would not have had the cleverness to cloak murder in the guise of accident, nor the quick wit and self-control to see it through. No one could have done it save Storm himself!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BLACK BAG.

WHEN they reached his station he touched Horton lightly on the arm to apprise him of the fact and was amazed at the latter's quick, defensive start. What did the man fear? His secretiveness, his evident intention at first to deny his identity; what could they portend? Could it be that Horton was a fugitive from justice? Storm smiled at the thought. Why he himself, if the world only knew—

But Horton's ebullient spirits bubbled over when they emerged on the street level and a hasty glance about assured him that no other pedestrians were near.

"Lord, but it's good to be in New York again, Norman!" he exclaimed. "The old burg is the greatest little spot on God's green earth, let me tell you! The sight and sound and smell of it get into a fellow's blood. Talk about the East a calling! It's deaf and dumb compared to the urge of little old Manhattan!"

"Feel that way about it?" Storm's lip curled as he remembered his own glowing futile dreams of the Far East.

"You bet I do!" Horton shifted his umbrella to grasp more firmly the small black bag which he was carrying. "Do you know, Norman, there have been nights down in Mexico and up in Alaska and out on the plains when I would have given five years of my life for an hour here!

"Mind you, it isn't so much the bright lights—I can't afford, for more reasons than one, to cut loose as I used to—but it's what these literary cusses call 'atmosphere,' I guess; there's something in the life here, any phase of it, that gets under a guy's skin and makes him itch to get back!"

"Mexico? Alaska?" repeated Storm with unconscious envy. "You've been about a bit, Jack, haven't you?"

"Surest thing you know!" The other laughed, adding, as Storm halted. "This where you hang out? Oh, boy! Some class to you!"

"I took these rooms off the hands of a friend only lately," Storm replied, wincing in spite of himself at Horton's uncouth appreciation. "I have lived out of town for years."

He opened the apartment door and switched on the lights, and his companion gave a low whistle.

"Some class!" he repeated admiringly. "You must have made good, Norman."

There was an element of surprise in his tone that nettled his host.

"I'm an official of the Mammoth Trust Company, you know," he said loftily. "Let me take your coat, Jack, and just put your bag down anywhere."

Horton allowed himself to be divested of his coat and hat, but when he followed Storm into the living-room he was still carrying the black bag, which he deposited on a corner of the couch, seating himself beside it.

"Mammoth Trust, eh?" he repeated. "Your old man was a big bug there at one time, wasn't he? I remember you used to talk about it in the old days; said he was going to get you an easy berth there when you graduated. By gad, you did fall in soft!"

Storm flushed at the imputation, although he found no words with which to deny it. What a rough boor Jack had become! He almost regretted that he had brought him home. Still, even he was better than no one.

"Cocktail?" he asked suggestively.

Horton shook his head.

"I'm off the fancy stuff," he replied. "Fact is, I'm not supposed to be touching anything at all, but I may as well take the lid off since we're going to make a night of it. Got any Scotch?"

Storm produced the bottle, siphon, and two tall glasses, and went into the kitchen to crack some ice. His guest followed him to the door after a quick backward glance at his bag.

"Great little place you've got here." He glanced about him and back at his host. Then for the first time he noted the latter's mourning garb, and his eyes widened. "Look here, Norman, you—you've lost some one. Not your wife?"

Storm nodded.

"You don't say! I'm confoundedly sorry, old scout!" Horton exclaimed with real feeling. "I knew you were married, of course; saw your wife's picture in the society papers more than once a few years ago. When you brought me here and I lamped it was a typical bachelor's diggings, I didn't like to ask questions; divorces here are thicker than fleas below the border, and you never can tell. When did it happen, Norman?"

"A little over a month ago." Storm turned to the ice chest, as if to cut off further question or attempt at sympathy, but Horton was as impervious to snubs as a good-natured puppy.

"Isn't it hell?" he soliloquized. "When a fellow's happy, something rotten always happens. Beautiful woman, wasn't she? Any kids?"

"No," replied his host shortly. "Come on, let's have our drink and then we'll see what we can dig up for dinner. Homachi usually stuffs the pantry shelves pretty well."

The glasses were filled and Horton raised his, somewhat uncomfortably oppressed with the lack of fitting words. Storm forestalled him hastily.

"I don't talk much about my trouble, Jack. Let's try to forget it for to-night. This is a reunion, and I'm damn glad to have you here! Happy days!"

Horton nodded and drank deeply, drawing a long breath of satisfaction.

"That's the stuff!" he approved. "Some kick to it, all right! Do you ever see anything of the old crowd?"

"I run into one or another of them at the club now and then." Storm put down his glass. "I'll go and investigate the pantry; you must be starved."

"I could do with a little nourishment," Horton acquiesced. "Let me help you rustle the grub. You don't look as if you were much of a hand at it."

"Are you?"

Horton laughed boisterously.

"Just watch me!" he cried. "I've been roughing it for years, in one way and another; mining camps, oil leases, cattle ranches and even a tramp steamer."

"Really? You haven't told me a thing about yourself yet, Jack. The last I heard of you you were working in a bank out in Chicago."

"Yeah!" Horton snorted disgustedly. "Nice kid glove and silk hat job; thirty bucks a week and a bum lung. Say, where can I put this bag of mine?"

"Why, leave it there." Storm stared. "Nobody is going to walk off with it."

"Not if I know it, they're not!" returned his guest with emphasis. "I've got some mighty important stuff in here. Got any place where I can lock it up? I'd feel easier in my mind—"

"Why, of course!" Storm threw open a closet door. "Here, keep the key yourself if it will give you any satisfaction. Now come on; I'm hungry, myself."

They found the pantry well stocked and made a hearty meal. Storm, usually an abstemious drinker poured out a second Scotch and under its influence grew expansive. He regaled his guest with tales of high finance, adroitly registering his own importance in the trust company and his intimacy with men of large affairs. It was only later when they returned again to the living-room that he became conscious of a seeming reticence on the part of his friend.

"But tell me about yourself," he demanded. "Will you smoke? Try one of these."

He offered the humidor and Horton selected a cigar and eyed it almost reverently.

"A fifty-center!" he exclaimed. "Gee, you're hitting the high spots, all right, and I don't wonder after what you've been telling me! As to myself; well, I'm no great shakes but I'm not kicking. I've had a pretty good time of it, by and large."

"But you said something before dinner about lung trouble." Storm lit his own cigarette and held the match to the other's cigar. "You certainly don't look it now."

"Fact, though," Horton nodded. "Good thing, too, or I would have been a pasty-faced, pretty-mannered bank clerk to this day. It was a question of living out in the open or dying in a hall-room and the West looked good to me.

"I started in as pay-master in a mining camp, and believe me it was some job for a tenderfoot who had never been nearer to a gun than across the footlights at a melodrama! I learned to travel heeled and be quick on the draw and a few other things; human nature, generally. It's funny the fascination other people's money has for some folks. Never felt that way, myself; I guess that's why I've usually had charge of the pay roll."

Storm smiled bitterly, his thought reverting to the pseudo Du Chainat and his own money lying now at the bottom of the sea. He had boasted of his affluence to Horton to soothe his wounded self-esteem at the latter's naive appraisement of him

but his own predicament had returned with crushing force. Happily, Horton was aware of no lack of response on the part of his host.

"Yes, *sir!*" he continued. "It's no credit to me that I've run straight, but it kind of gives a fellow a damned good feeling to know that folks realize without question that he's worthy of trust. Why, right now—" He broke off and added in a lower tone: "I'm a hell of a fellow to pin medals on myself! I ought to be miles away this minute and going fast.

"Couldn't resist a glimpse of the old town, though, and I reckon I can take care of myself. I thought I would just look 'round a bit and then be on my way, but you came along—"

"And you tried to pass me up!" Storm recalled the other's furtive manner. "What is the game, anyway, Jack? Where are you bound for?"

"A jumping-off place back in the Alleghanies." Horton grimaced. "Some different from your berth here, isn't it? You've got a nice mahogany rolltop, I suppose, and nothing on your mind but your hat, while I travel with my eyes peeled and my finger on the trigger. See this?"

He reached in his hip pocket and produced a blunt-nosed pistol which winked wickedly in the light.

"Good Heavens! What do you carry that thing around with you for?" Storm gasped.

"Looks like business, doesn't it? Fact is, I'm pay-master now for one of the biggest coal companies in Pennsylvania, and when you've got charge of a small fortune every month and an army of foreign laborers and general riff-raff know it, it's just as well to be on the look-out." He laid the weapon on the table and ground out the stub of his cigar regretfully in the ash-tray. "That was some smoke!"

"Have another," Storm invited. "I only smoke cigarettes myself, but these are supposed to be pretty good, I believe."

"They are that!" his guest agreed with unction. "Lord, I don't know when I've had a feed like this, and three good hookers of Scotch and such tobacco!" He lighted a fresh cigar and sprawled back in his chair with a sigh of content. "This is certainly the life!"

"There's more Scotch—" Storm began suggestively, but Horton shook his head.

"Not for mine, thanks. I'm at peace with the world. If it weren't for that bag of mine—"

"What's in it, anyway?" Storm asked idly. "Money for your gang out there?"

"You've guessed it, son." Horton sat up suddenly. "I'll show you something that will make your eyes pop out, for all your big deals! You fellows who write checks and tear off coupons don't know what money is; it is only when you handle the actual coin in bulk that you realize what it stands for."

He crossed to the closet and unlocked it while Storm watched him, diverted in spite of himself at the other's complacency.

"Here you are!" Horton opened the bag on the table. "Have a look!"

Storm obeyed. Packets of yellow-backed bills, sheaves on sheaves of them, met his gaze and cylinders of coins. The bag was filled to the brim with them!

"All gold!" Horton explained, pointing to the cylinders. "Some of the workmen won't take anything else. Do you know how much I've got here, old scout? One hundred and twelve thousand, five hundred and fifty-two dollars and eighty-four cents!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PAYROLL.

IN contemplation of the money, Storm was stirred despite his sangfroid. Horton's psychology had been sound; it was one thing to deal in figures and quite another to view the actual cash before one.

"This is some money!" He unconsciously adopted his companion's slang. "I don't wonder you go heeled, as you call it, with that much at stake!"

"I've handled twice as much during the war, when we were speeding up production to the limit," Horton boasted as he fastened the bag and placed it on the floor at his feet. "Twice as much and then some, and never lost a cent!

"I'm not taking any chances, though; the constabulary down there do their part, and a wonderful lot of fellows they are, but they can't be everywhere at once. The last guy that held my job was found in a thicket by the road with his head bashed in. The birds that got him were caught, but a lot of good it did him! No, *sir*, I take mighty good care not to land in his shoes!"

A hundred and twelve thousand dollars! The figures themselves held an odd fascination for Storm and he could not keep his eyes from straying to the bag.

"I had an experience out in Montana in the early days when I was new to the game." Horton settled back once more luxuriously into his chair. "I was only carrying five thousand then, but it looked as big as a million to me and I don't mind telling you that I was plumb scared of the responsibility. I had a wild bit of road to cover between the town and the mine and I jumped at every shadow.

"We had a rough lot out there, too; scum of the earth, even for a raw mining camp. One night four guys that we had turned off laid for me; they'd have done for me, too, only by sheer dumb luck I got the drop on them first. I held 'em there, all four of 'em, till a gang of our own men came along, but it was a narrow squeak for me! Lord, but I was one sick *hombre!*"

He chuckled reminiscently, but his host did not smile. Instead his lips tightened and an avid gleam came into his eyes. A hundred and twelve thousand dollars! What it would mean to him! If he had Jack's opportunity—

"There was another time down in Mexico." His guest was in the flood tide of garrulity now, all unconscious of the train of thought his innocent display had evoked. "A couple of greasers tried to stick me up, but I drilled a hole in one of them and the other beat it for the hills. It's tame here in the East compared to those days, but there's always a chance of trouble in my game."

How ridiculously small and flimsy the black bag looked to contain such tremendous potentialities! All that Du Chainat's alluring proposition had held out, and more, was there before him in the custody of this smirking, self-assured boor! Storm felt a wave of unaccountable hatred for the other man sweeping over him. What right had Jack Horton to flaunt that money in his face? God, if it were only his!

He roused himself to realize that the other was eying him in a crestfallen fashion, disappointed that his narrative had seemed to make no impression and Storm collected his vagrant thoughts.

"I envy you your experiences," he said. "The element of danger must be exhilarating. To walk out of the station, as you did to-night, and realize that if the very men who rubbed shoulders with you in the street knew what was in that bag your life might not be worth tuppence—"

"Say, look here!" Horton showed traces of alarm. "I told you in confidence, old scout! For the love of Pete, don't mention it! It would mean my job if the company heard that I had been flashing the payroll! They must never get onto it that I stopped off in town; no one must know! You'll keep it a secret that you met me?"

"Of course." Storm nodded. "You don't know how well I can keep a secret."

"You're the only living soul who knows where I am this minute!" The other chuckled, reassured. "Not that I'll be missed for these few hours. The company don't check me upon time nor keep tabs on me; they know I'm honest and the money is as safe in my care as though it were still in the bank."

"*The only living soul who knows where I am!*" The words rang in Storm's ears with the insistence of a tolling bell and a tremendous, sinister idea was born. Nothing stood between him and the money there before his eyes, within reach of his hand, but this cocksure fathead! If he could get it away from him, secretly, without the other's knowing—

But that was impossible! The fool knew his business too well to be tricked; he had learned it in the roughest, wildest parts of the country, and here they were in the midst of the crowded city, where a single outcry would bring immediate investigation. Jack Horton would guard that bag while he lived. *While he lived!*

"No one will ever learn from me that I saw you to-night," Storm said slowly. "You needn't worry about that."

Horton nodded.

"Knew I could trust you, old scout! You know, now that I'm here, though, I'm damned if I wouldn't like to telephone a certain party." He turned speculative eyes on the instrument on the desk. "She needn't know where the call came from; I could tell her I was in Trenton or Scranton or Altoona and she wouldn't get me in a million years. I'd kind of like to hear her voice—"

"You're crazy!" Storm interrupted in rough haste. "This wire is listed! Don't you know a call can be traced? Suppose this woman, whoever she is, thinks of something else she wants to tell you after you have rung off, and gets central to call you back on the wire?

"It isn't always possible for them to do it, but they have been known to. It is nothing to me, of course, but you know how women talk; if you want her to know that you spent the evening here in town—"

"Not on your life, I don't!" ejaculated Horton. "She's all right; greatest little kid in the world, but I'm not giving anybody anything on me, especially when I'm in charge of the company's money."

Storm nodded acquiescence. No plan was as yet forming itself in his mind, but the sinister idea was becoming a resolution. He must have that money! Fate, after robbing him of his own, had replaced it twofold within his grasp. If Horton would not surrender it, and that thought was not worth considering, then Horton must be eliminated.

He had done it once and got away with it; why not again? But he must feel his way carefully, he must learn just where Horton stood, what his ties were. He must know from what quarter to expect inquiries if—he tried to say it to himself calmly, but his senses reeled at the immensity of it—if Horton disappeared.

"But you haven't told me anything about yourself, Jack; only about your work. You're not married?"

"Not me!" the other laughed, then amended; "at least, not yet. I've looked 'em all over, from Tampico to Nome and from Frisco to Boston, but I haven't seen one yet that I'd tie up to for keeps; except maybe this little dame I wanted to talk to just now. Prettiest little thing you ever saw in your life, Norman, and got a lot of horse sense beside. Want to see her picture?"

He pulled out his watch, snapped the case open, and extended it across the table.

The face in the little photograph was undeniably pretty, but the style of coiffure was overelaborate and even to Storm's untrained masculine eye, the gown seemed cheaply ornate; not the sort of thing that Leila or any of her set would have worn.

"Who is she?" he asked, correcting himself hastily. "I mean, where does she come from? She is mighty pretty," he added as he snapped the watch shut and handed it back.

"You've guessed it! She's no New Yorker; comes from Pennsylvania, out Bethlehem way. Her daddy made a pot of money in steel during the war, and she's on here trying to catch up with the procession. She'll do it, too, with the old man's cash and her looks." Horton grinned fatuously. "She's strong for your Uncle Jack, all right."

What an ass he looked, blithering there about a girl while at his feet lay the price of his life! But Storm must know more.

"Then I suppose congratulations are in order?" he queried, eying his guest through narrowed lids.

"Not yet. I don't mean to brag, but I have an idea they will be as soon as I make up my mind to say the word."

He paused to lay his cigar-stub with the others in the tray and Storm's eyes followed the motion as if fascinated. The mounting heap of pale-gray ashes reminded him suddenly of certain ashes which he had scattered in a garden at midnight a month before. They were so like them, light and flakey, tossed by a light wind, gone forever at the twist of an arm!

How easily that had been accomplished! Not only the destruction of the handkerchief, but of all other clues! How easily he had outwitted them all, and then he had been a mere amateur and handicapped by

the fact that the blow had been unpremeditated; when he started to build up the circumstantial evidence of accident he had been compelled to make what use he could of conditions as they lay. Sinister but intoxicating reflections came to him. He had succeeded then; could he fail now when the opportunity was his to prepare before hand each step of the way?

"How about your family, Jack? I haven't heard, you know, since I lost track of you." He must keep the conversation going somehow until he formed a plan.

"Haven't any." Horton shrugged. "My dad died right after his failure—you knew that—and mother went in two years, while my kid brother was killed in France. There's no one left except an uncle in Omaha and I cut loose from him years ago. It's too bad mother didn't live; she'd have liked 'Genie."

"'Genie?"

"Old man Saulsbury's daughter; girl in the watch. Her own mother is dead and she's staying here on Madison Avenue with some old widow who is long on the family-tree business and short on cash. She's going to fit 'Genie out properly."

"You may lose her if she gets into the social game," Storm remarked absently, his mind intent on his problem. On one thing he was determined; Horton should not leave that door with the money! Yet to kill him here was unthinkable.

A phrase which the other had used in telling of his predecessor's fate returned to Storm like a flash of inspiration: *'Found in a thicket by the road with his head bashed in.'* The Drive! Later it would be deserted enough; but how to get Horton out there—

"Lose 'Genie?" Horton repeated. "Not a chance! There's no nonsense about her, I can tell you! She is only doing this to please her daddy, but she'll never get stung by the society bug.

"I knew her before the old man made his pile and it hasn't changed her a mite. She'd stick to me through thick and thin, but when a fellow has led the free life I have, he isn't in too much of a hurry to settle down in double harness, even if it is silver mounted."

"There is no one else?" Storm regarded him quizzically. "For you, I mean? No other girl in the running?"

"No, *sir!* I never bothered much with them, anyway; been too busy. This Mid-Eastern Consolidated Coal Corporation is the biggest job I've had yet, and I'm planning to stick right with them and go on up. They know me, and once I get on the inside"—Horton paused and reached for the humidor—"I'm eating up your cigars, old scout! Look at that pile of ashes."

"Help yourself." Storm tossed the match-box across the table. "That's what they're here for. *Damn* the ashes!"

"Well, it's my last." Horton glanced at his watch. "Great Scott! Eleven thirty! I ought to be changing at Altoona right now for a little jerkwater road up into the mountains!

"Oh, what's the odds. It's been worth it, this powwow with you, Norman. I'll catch the twelve forty—"

"Why? I thought you were going to stay overnight!" stammered his host, aghast at this sudden hitch in his half-formulated plan. "I'm all alone here, as you see, and we can turn in any time you feel like it."

"I—I oughtn't to!" Horton hesitated and Storm seized upon his opportunity.

"You're safer here with that bag than you would be traveling at night. You can get a train at almost any hour in the morning, and you said they didn't check you up on your time." He paused and as the other still visibly wavered he added persuasively: "Tell you what I'll do, Jack. I've got some business to attend to in Philadelphia that would require my presence there in a day or two, anyway; if you'll wait over I'll go part of the way with you to-morrow. It isn't often that two chaps who were such good pals at college meet after so many years, and we have a lot to talk over yet."

"That's so," Horton agreed. "A few hours more or less won't make any difference, I guess, and I'll be mighty glad to have your company part of the way in the morning. I'm not due back until late in the afternoon; got through my business to-day ahead of time. That's how I came to think of stopping off for a look at the old town."

"It would make trouble if you weren't there to-morrow, though?" Storm asked slowly. "I mean, if you should stay over with me—"

"Trouble? Say!" Horton leaned forward impressively. "If I weren't there by six o'clock to-morrow night every wire in the East would be hot from efforts to locate me. I'm not so precious to them, but their little old hundred thousand odd—wow!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN HIS HANDS.

HE flicked the ashes from his cigar and a few flakes missed the tray and fell on the shining surface of the table-top. Storm watched them settle, just as those other ashes must have settled among the flowers. God! Why did he have to think of that now? *'In a thicket with his head bashed in!'* There was a spot up the Drive past the viaduct where the path turned sharply and on the other side of the low wall was a sheer drop of fifty feet or more with stout bushes clinging to it all the way down. A living man could grab them and save himself, perhaps, but a dead body, hurtled over the wall—

"You'll get there, all right." Storm forced himself to speak casually. "You're traveling light, but I can make you comfortable for the night—"

"Comfortable?" Horton spread his legs out luxuriously. "I'm so darned comfortable right now that I wouldn't change places with a king! Lord, but it's like old times to see you again, Norman! Twenty years is a long stretch, but it seems only yesterday that we sat smoking together in your old rooms, and usually planning some devilment, too!

"Remember the love letters on pink paper that we sent to the old chemistry prof—what was his name? Oh, yes, Peebles. Gad, we kept them up for weeks until he was afraid to look even the president's old maid sister in the face!"

He chuckled reminiscently and Storm's lips twisted in a smile. *"Head bashed in!"* How could he do it? What sort of weapon?

From where he sat he could look over his guest's shoulder into the hall and the umbrella-stand was in a direct line of vision. Potter had been rather a connoisseur of canes and among those he had left behind him in his hurried departure was a curious one with a loaded head. A tap with it would crack a skull like an egg-shell!

But not if that skull were covered by a thick, soft felt hat, such as Horton wore when they met. If he could contrive to make him put on an old golf cap, on some pretext; could get him up the Drive to that lonely spot where the wall sheered down he would have but to strike once and the bag and its precious contents would be his! He listened. Had the rain stopped? It was no longer beating against the window, at any rate. He must make an excuse to look out and see.

"We certainly pulled off a few stunts in the old days!" he observed. "Don't you think it's a bit stuffy in here? Let's get some of the smoke out."

He rose and strolled to the window, trembling with inward excitement, but forcing himself to walk slowly, casually. He raised the window. The pavement was still wet and glistening, but overhead the stars winked down at him.

"Hello, it's clearing off!" he announced. "We might have a stroll later, before we turn in."

"What for?" Horton asked unenthusiastically. "I've been on the jump all day. It is good enough for me right here."

"Then what do you say to a little drink? Storm heard the footsteps of a lone pedestrian approaching and hurriedly closing the window, pulled down the shade. Horton was seated where the light played strongly on his face and he would be plainly visible from the street. A passer-by glancing in would think nothing strange about seeing a man sitting quietly smoking there, but he might chance to remember the face; he might recall it later when a hue and cry was raised and pictures were printed in the newspapers. "As long as you're staying on here with me to-night another little nip or two won't do you any harm. This is an occasion, you know!"

Rigidly as he held himself in control,

there was a note of suppressed eagerness in his tone which the unsuspicious Horton misread.

"On with the dance!" he cried gaily. "I'm with you, old scout! Just one, though; got to have a clear head in the morning. Booze is a good thing to let alone in my business, but I know when I've had enough. Do you remember the time we got pickled in Dutch Jake's and you wanted to go and serenade the whole faculty?"

While he chattered on serenely Storm moved in and out, bringing glasses, ice and a fresh siphon. He mixed as stiff a drink as he dared for his guest, a light one for himself and raised his glass.

"To ourselves!" he exclaimed with a reckless laugh. "That's the best toast in the world, Jack, and the most honest one. To us!"

"And our next meeting." Horton drank, nor noticed that his host set his glass down untasted while a faint shudder swept over him. "Phew! But that's a strong one! I need a little more fizz in that, old scout." He reached for the siphon. "Say, what wouldn't I give if we could all be together again, just once; the old crowd, I mean! There was Van Tries and Caldwell and Holworthy and Swain and McKnight. I wonder what has become of them all!"

"Holworthy is here in town; I run into him now and then." Storm raised his glass slowly, watching the hand that held it. Steady as a die!

"That so?" Horton looked up, interested. "What is his line?"

"Real estate. He's the same old plodding George, except that he is getting fat. McKnight died in the prison-camp at Rastatt and Swain went under in Wall Street and blew the top of his head off."

Horton's ruddy face sobered.

"That makes three of the old crowd gone, for Caldwell was killed in a motor smash-up," he said. "I remember reading about it in the papers. All violent deaths, too! Well, maybe we're none of us fated to die in our own beds."

Storm started nervously and glanced at him. Was there something prophetic in Horton's speech? Then he shook himself angrily. Bah! He was getting morbid. Morbid, with a hundred thousand dollars at his feet, waiting for him to pick it up!

Horton, too, stirred in his chair as though shaking off unwelcome thoughts, and added:

"Anyway, here we are! You're well fixed and I'm on the road to it; that leaves only Van Tries, of our bunch. Ever hear anything from him?"

"Not since he beat it for Japan with another man's wife."

"You don't say!" Horton's eyes widened. "Well, he always was a wild one; too much money and no responsibility. I tell you, Norman, money is a comfortable thing to have, but it causes a hell of a lot of trouble in this world! Not that mine will ever bother me very much, but fellows like Van Tries—they don't know the value of it till it's gone and then they're out for the count because they've never learned to do anything except to spend."

His tone had dropped to a monotonous drawl with a note of fatigue in it, and Storm drew a deep breath. It was nearly one o'clock. His plan was complete and there remained only to put it to the test.

How quickly the inspiration had come to him. How simple it was and yet how masterly! Perhaps that first murder had sharpened his wits for this! There was no reason for waiting longer; it must be now or never!

He rose.

"What do you say to a little stroll, Jack, before we hit the bay?" he asked with studied carelessness. "Not a long one, for I know you must be tired after traveling all day, but I don't sleep very well lately unless I get a bit of fresh air just before I turn in."

Breathlessly he watched the other. What if Horton should suggest that he go alone? What if—

"I'm with you." Horton rose equably. "We must be smoked up like a couple of hams."

He reached out a hand for his pistol, but Storm stopped him with a nervous laugh.

"Here! There's a Sullivan law in this town against carrying concealed weapons! You don't want that thing with you; put it in the table-drawer, there."

"All right." Horton opened the drawer and then hesitated. "The money! There have been hold-ups on the Drive. I've read of them—"

"Good Lord! You weren't going to cart that bag along, were you?" Storm's tone was a perfect blend of amusement and good-natured expostulation. "Why, man, we'll only be gone ten minutes, fifteen at most! Lock it up again in the closet; no one is going to break in here!"

Horton shook his head obstinately.

"I never leave it out of my sight when I'm on the job," he said. "You never can tell, you know, Norman."

"I suppose some sneak-thief is clairvoyant enough to know that money is here to-night of all nights, in a bag in a locked closet!" Storm shrugged. "Camouflage it behind some hat-boxes and things on the shelf if you like. I tell you we'll be gone only a few minutes and the watchman is right outside."

"It's a big chance," Horton responded doubtfully. "I suppose it sounds foolish to you, but I've learned to play safe. Still, if it is only for five minutes—"

He picked up the bag and started for the closet. Storm watched him stow it carefully away with a smile of triumph. The fool was taking such pains—for him! He put onu his own coat and then caught up Horton's. The felt hat which the latter had worn rolled to the floor, limp and sodden.

"I say, your hat is drenched!" He could scarcely keep the note of exultation from sounding in his voice. The last obstacle removed! Everything was playing into his hands; he couldn't fail!

"I told you that your umbrella leaked! Just reach up on the top shelf there and get a golf cap. There is a stack of my old ones up there and none of my hats would fit you. There is no sense in getting a cold in the head from wearing that wet thing, and you'll have to get it reblocked before train-time to-morrow. It's a mess."

"It sure is!" Horton eyed it ruefully and, reaching up into the closet, brought out a golf cap of thin, dark-blue cloth. Storm himself locked the closet door and held out the key.

"You'll feel safer if you've got it yourself," he remarked. "Now come on."

Horton dropped the key into his vest-pocket and then drew on the cap with a ludicrous grimace at his reflection in the hall mirror.

"I look like a bally yachtsman!" he commented. "I suppose I'll have to go in for golf and all the rest of it if I land in right with the Mid-Eastern Consolidated, you know, and hitch up with the little girl, eh, what?"

"You'd be a shark at it, too," Storm switched off the lights and opened the door, stepping aside for his guest to precede him. "I don't play any more, but it's a great little game."

As Horton crossed the threshold Storm's hand closed over the head of the heavy cane and he drew it out of the stand. Then the door closed behind them.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

WHITE LIES

BY HARRY F. BOWLING

THE tiny worm, a pinch of salt might choke,
Will eat the heart out of the sturdy oak,
The drop of water falling day by day
In course of time wears continents away.
So the pure life of reputation dies,
Strangled in gossamer threads of thin white lies.

Bad Boileau and Beaut'

by Harold de Polo

PERHAPS it was significant that both Bad Boileau and Beaut' made their bow to the northland on the same day: perhaps, as a grizzled old-timer later expressed it, fate was just having a bit of fun by ironically setting the stage. Decidedly the contention is plausible, for if ever two lives seemed to twine and untwine, one around the other, they were those of the Canadian and the wolf!

The man deserved the sobriquet; it was even mild. Considering the devil he was as well as the fact of human weakness for alliteration, what else could he have been dubbed? Too, he had gained the title without delay. With an Indian helper, he was putting into some semblance of comfort the abandoned cabin along the Mackenzie. Looking up at a yelp from one of his tired dogs, he had descried a slinking gray form in the distance. Instinctively he had reached for his rifle, his eyes narrowing coldly.

Then, as they focused more clearly, he had shrugged and turned his lip. The wolf, he had learned, was a female heavy with young; more, she had been somewhat seriously wounded. The thing was apparent.

"*Pouf,*" he commented, grinning at the Indian, "eempossible she go far. Bimeby be *more!*"

Later, when his energy and sheer power had done what it would have taken another man double the time to accomplish, he signaled his helper to follow him.

"We go get pelt, now," he explained.

On looking back at it the Indian vows that even then he noticed the mad glint in the blackish eyes; also, he says that as they trailed the plain tracks in the snow the trapper positively licked at his lips like a hungry man who contemplates a feast. He tells that they found the quarry a mere half mile off, where she had made the haven of a shallow cave.

She had done the duty of a mother—three furry little forms told that. But two of them, as well as her own body, were stretched out stiff. Only one had life, and the youngster surely showed it as he blindly persisted in trying to obtain sustenance from the cold maternal breast.

Boileau, his helper continues, mouthed a string of vile words, apparently because he had discovered the animal dead. It had seemed odd at the time, for what could he have wanted with her alive?

Now it is simple; the man had been cheated of his torture. Anyway, the weird joy had come back to his eyes soon. He had kicked viciously at the dead mother, and reached out one huge hand for the suckling whelp. He had gripped it by the scruff of the neck, and pulled it away. The youngster, though, had other ideas—and he gamely and innocently put them into execution. He squirmed swiftly, worked himself around, and snapped at the offensive fingers.

The Indian is sure that Boileau was not

bitten; a fang no more than grazed the back of his hand. But the man, he says, became terrible. He showed teeth through his black beard, and his eyes were on fire. Carefully, deliberately, he got a strangle hold on the cub. Then, with his abnormally muscular fingers he calmly ripped a great gash in the little wolf's lip. After that he dangled the animal before him and studied it happily.

"Now you no forget, by Gar, eh? Now you no forget w'at happen heem w'at fight Boileau! *Sacré,* but you are ugly—ugly, but beeg an' strong. You be gran' dog for sled bimeby! An' I have nice name—Beaut'! Ha, ha, to call you Beaut'. Ees dro!!!"

Laughing inordinately, the Indian states they had gone back to the cabin, where his employer solicitously fed the wolf whelp with condensed milk. He says that through it all the trapper kept chuckling, amusedly repeating the name he had bestowed. And that is the most authentic report of the first meeting between the man who was immediately christened Bad Boileau and the animal he himself had mockingly called Beaut'!

Boileau, as the days went by, had plenty of cause to laugh at the name he had given his captive. Of a surety, "Beaut'" proved to be a misnomer—a grim one. His eyes were mere slits, crafty almost from birth; his jaw was really ludicrously long, with ever-visible fangs; his head and shoulders seemed out of proportion, resting as they did on long spindle legs.

An awkward, savage-looking chap, the verdict was. Too, it was carried right out in his disposition. His owner was met with a snapping growl every time he approached him; any stranger who chanced by and essayed to poke fun at him soon changed his mind. Indeed, the only one who wasn't bothered happened to be the stoical Indian helper. Possibly the fact that he himself never bothered the wolf partly accounted for it.

This is not to say that Boileau began to practise the fine points of his cruelty in the beginning. With all his deviltry, he was a shrewd and logical person—which may have helped along the exquisite quality of the first trait. He realized practically at the start that he had in Beaut' an extraordinary possession.

For all his ungainliness the youngster showed a strength that boded well for the future. His shoulders, from the standpoint of a dog driver, were a glorious joy to behold. In time—and in much less than the usual time—the Canadian knew that he would have the most powerful animal in the northland. *Dieu;* but it would be a delight to see him straining at the traces!

The trapper, therefore, nurtured him with a scrupulous solicitude that savored of dotage. Withal, it was rigid attention, and it was not free of sturdy cuffs when deemed necessary.

These did not deter Beaut'. Implacable hate always came to his eyes when Boileau approached; his vicious jaws, with their lightninglike twist, always snapped for the man when he passed within striking distance. But his master did not mind this. He chuckled his deep, short satisfaction and said that what was a creature without spunk? Also, he dryly added that it would make it all the more amusing when their battling actually commenced.

As to Beaut', he grew with truly avid rapidity. His growth, too, was not purely physical; indeed, Boileau swore that the ugly spitfire had the brain of a veteran. He was never without a collar and leash, now, securely staked. His fame spread. Boileau used to enjoy it when passers by got the habit of stopping for a look at him. It caused that mad gleam to come to his eyes just to stand by and watch the wolf receive his audience.

Usually they taunted him, as the superior human is apt to taunt the inferior animal who has gained a reputation for "badness." They always went away satisfied, for Beaut' lashed out like a fiendish whirlwind when they prodded at him with a stick. It was this fury that pleased Boileau—pleased him keenly!

But Beaut's fury toward the casual pesterer was a tame thing when compared to that which he lavished on his owner. It was a remarkable hate and a consuming one. Let the trapper come anywhere near

him and the wolf went almost literally insane. Time after time, with wicked shrieks and clicking fangs, he would hurl himself at his enemy. He did not seem to mind the biting of the heavy rawhide or the rough tumbles he was forced to take. Apparently just the joy of expressing his sentiments atoned for that.

He never became exhausted, and only when the man had walked off, leering grimly, would Beaut' cease his attacks. Then he would lie down and study that retreating back with an eye that might have sent a shiver along it had Boileau seen.

The captive, before long, had more right than ever to exhibit his hate—for Boileau believed the hour ripe for his torture. He started gently enough. Substituting a steel chain for the leather leash, he perfectly gaged the freedom it allowed his victim. Then, coming with the most delectable meal he had ever brought, he placed it exactly beyond the reach of Beaut'—a matter of inches.

Following this, he was able to leisurely seat himself and enjoy his pipe while watching the frantic efforts of his ravenous prisoner. He was content with this, that first day—content to, in the end, coolly walk off and leave the wolf still hungry. Again, too, he laughed; those sharp, demonlike chuckles.

He came the second day and placed before the lean, blood-eyed wild thing a still more sumptuous repast. Once more he viewed the empty-mawed animal madly strive to reach the food. Finally, with a quick touch of his boot, he sent the heaped platter into the circle. And Beaut', as yet ignorant of trickery, gulped gluttonously.

It was for just this moment that Bad Boileau had been nursing the situation—and truly he was not disappointed in the fun that followed. The wolf, after the second mouthful, emitted a howl of rage and pain, and behaved much in the manner of some crazy, drunken jack-in-the-box. He coughed and sputtered and sneezed, and leaped and shook and rolled over and over, all the while crying his wo. Considering that his master had seasoned the food with a full box of red pepper, one cannot very well blame him.

In one way it served Beaut' well; he decidedly was not so simple to quiz. On the other hand, it caused Boileau to use more thought—and when the Canadian was forced to this his cruelty became more poignant. Still, taking it all in all, one might call it a victory for the wolf, for he assuredly won on points.

Witness the trapper's next attempt. This time he again essayed his starvation process, only he let it go two whole days and two whole colder nights. But now, when he placed the food just out of reach—the food that the animal must have fiercely craved—Beaut' did not even deign to consider it. What he did do must have ruffled the little nerves of his opponent. He glanced at the latter—a rather slow, casual glance—and airily turned away his head. Then he yawned—just once—and snuggled his muzzle into the snow. Through his white teeth Boileau hissed a native curse!

Oh, yes, Beaut' was learning—and he kept on learning even more quickly than he kept on growing. Any referee, now, would have given him the daily battle on sheer form and poise. He never made the slightest misplay, and he therefore forced Boileau to do all the fighting.

Only when a clear opening came—and it must needs be a perfectly clear one—did he take the offensive. Too, when he did he practically always struck home. He did not mind, if in payment, he was compelled to take a painful thrashing. Was it not worth all the hot cuts of the leather to feel claw or fang in contact with Boileau's flesh? Truly it was; truly the greatest physical agony imaginable faded to insignificance beside the unalloyed joy that was experienced when red blood was drawn from the Canadian's loathed body.

Finally, Beaut' was rendered the highest compliment possible. The day arrived when his owner deemed him sufficiently fit for breakage to the traces. This in itself was extreme admiration, for the wolf was far below age in actual months; however, he made up for it in bulk and power. He rose a full four inches above the present lead husky—and the other was no mean specimen.

Where Boileau paid him homage, though,

was in the fact that he approached him for loosening with a club ready for action. It should be known, to properly understand, that it had been one of Boileau's arrogant boasts that he had broken in every dog—and more than a few wolves — with his hairy hands alone. To do the man justice it is fair to honestly record that he was not lying.

The breaking of Beaut' to the traces is still pedestaled in the northland. Never before—or never since—was there gamer fighter. Boileau used his club—Boileau used his club and other things as well. He used them so extensively that even the Indian helper, stoic that he be, will grunt shudderingly whenever the thing is mentioned.

The wolf fought — *Dieu,* says Boileau, but how the beast resisted! It was in accord with his nature, this business of resisting and resisting until he found it was futile. True, it took him always a long time to buckle under—but it was not through ignorance. Rather, it was that grim determination to refuse to give up hope.

Eventually, of course, his reason usually triumphed over his blind rage—and so did it do in this instance. Indeed, within several months he was proclaimed the greatest leader the country had known. Men accustomed to grappling with the north are tight-lipped of praise; too, they took in brain as well as brawn when they said it!

There followed, for the wolf, a not altogether unpleasant period. It possessed, at least, the charm of newness. To lead the fast string, to ever urge them on to swifter speed and to ever evade the snapping teeth of the dog behind, sent somewhat of a tingling thrill through Beaut'. Of course, it was plain hard work—for Boileau's trap lines were of alarming proportions—proportions in keeping with the energetic strength of the man and his famed string of dogs.

Withal, it is easily understood that grilling exertion was far better than chafing at the end of a steel chain and necklet. Too, the wolf enjoyed his supremacy over his companions. The despotic sway he wielded was agreeable. It bolstered the confidence he cherished that some day, somehow, Boileau would cease to reign.

Although asserting that Beaut's life was not wholly unpleasant, it must not be inferred that it was exactly serene. Oh, no; the trapper still twanged on his favorite strings—the little, fine nerves that hold one together. The wolf was always staked out, after the run, to that abhorred and incontestible chain. Food would immediately be thrown to the other dogs, and Boileau would watch with that frigid glitter in his eye.

But Beaut' was no longer taunted by this; as the mood had him, he would either yawn and turn aside, or else, with lifted lip, send his enemy a single vicious glance. It was for this latter mood that he paid heaviest. Boileau would toss him his frozen fish, and stand by with his long whip. He weilded it expertly. At a generous twenty feet, he could exquisitely flick the tip of the animal's nose as he lunged for his meal.

Beaut', when particularly empty-mawed, would be content to take the blows; at other times he would simply wait—wait. Eventually he found that whatever he did he would in the end get the food—for his owner would have lost by weakening him. And at last this game was ruined.

Is it really essential to go into much further detail? Surely one may see, from what is already known, the ghastliness of Boileau's cruelty. Too, even hardened and heart-scarred old-timers, when they finally learned of some of the Canadian's tortures, knotted fingers to fists and muttered something about desiring to get at a certain black throat. Yes, there are some things prettier untold.

Through it all—through that racking space that took in over fifteen months—Beaut' tenaciously held his own and stoked the fires of his hate. He never let up on this—and neither did Boileau. It was the latter's firm belief that he would yet crumple the splendid savagery of his opponent, and from every visible sign the wolf deemed that the life of the human would be his toll.

Even with its foulness on the man's part, it was a superb battle—this battle of keen wits and indomitable courage. For the

trapper, at times, took chances—when the reckless mood was on him and he needed excitement. True, there is a prevalent idea that stamps a cruel man as a craven man at heart—and it is about on par with likening a human to a "beast" when some atrocity is committed. No; Boileau was a brave man. Time after time had he verified it with his own ilk. Yes; the battle between the two may—and should—be termed superb!

There came a change in Beaut'—and it came with a suddenness that startled Boileau. It did more; it tricked his mind into traveling the wrong channel. The wolf's apparent apathy, when free from the traces, he judged as a sign of the beginning of complete surrender. He had no fault to find with him in harness, for there he worked with that tireless stamina that was happiness to behold.

Boileau, be it known, was not aware that one moonlit night his captive had heard a cry—a dim, far cry that nevertheless had stirred within him the dormant, inherent instincts of which the man had cheated him. The wild was asserting itself; it was doing it with almost maddening insistency. However, opposite it was a wily knowledge of man and life that Beaut' had absorbed in his long combat with his enemy. He realized the value of caution—and he exercised it.

It was after the hardest run he had ever known—a run under which several of the dogs had almost collapsed—that Beaut' came into his own. Boileau, as he halted his string before his cabin, for the first time failed to send out his lash with a final crackling flourish.

Instead, he stretched his tired limbs before reaching down for the chain that was to hold the wolf. He came forward, too, without his club. Reaching Beaut', he found the animal flattened out, gasping for breath—and that mad joy flickered for an instant in his eyes. He unharnessed his captive and bent down to apply the collar—and a portion of hell broke loose!

Action was incredibly swift. Beaut' came to life with a snarling shriek and gaping jaws. Straight for the black-haired throat he made his spring. It was lightninglike; it was perfectly aimed—but it was aimed at Bad Boileau. For all his massive bulk, he possessed catlike agility. He flung himself to the side as the gray form grazed his shoulder. Simultaneously the short hatchet at his hip was in his hand, raised. But it never came down!

Only too well Beaut' knew the hopelessness of attacking that shiny, deadly edge. Already he was in the safety of the dense firs. Free!

Worn though he had been from the day's work, on that first night Beaut' ran. He ran utterly wild; his blood pumping, his every fiber tingling. There was a tang in the air he had never felt before—a tang that banished fatigue and injected new life. After all, freedom is a mighty tonic—the mightiest. It stands on a pinnacle, in a class all by itself, and nothing will ever pull it down or rise anything else to like heighth!

And the wolf was tasting it—tasting it for the first time in his life—tasting it after galling, obnoxious slavery. He was not content with a mouthful; he wanted to feast, to gorge, actually to the bursting point. He tested his speed, and attained a pace that would have caused Boileau, had he seen it, to purse his lips and draw in that grating whistle of surprised admiration.

He sent out his call—that penetrating call of kind to kind, of male to female. It echoed and re-echoed across the white silences, and the tune of it was sweet to Beaut's own ears. But no answer, on that wonderful night, came!

But there was too much else to glory in. Wise creature that he was, he attended before all to the most important law of the open. Here, too, though he knew his power, he was slightly dazed by the bigness of it. With one single spring, with one single crunch of his long jaws, he pulled down a buck.

Then he ate, gluttonously. The warm blood thrilled him, coursed through his veins, and insidiously crept into and mastered his brain. He went drunk — mad, blind, viciously drunk. He craved more intoxicants—and he got them.

He killed, that night; killed just for the sake of killing; killed just for the sensation of experiencing his strength. From all that can be learned, it was Beaut's one lapse from shrewd, crafty behavior. Considering the circumstances, one feels compelled to pardon him. Surely one debauch is permitted to every life.

It was not long before Beaut' found that which would appease his craving. To be precise, it happened on the dawn that followed his riotous night. He came across the gaunt pack—doubly gaunt from a hard and bitter season—as they hungrily trailed enticingly fresh moose tracks.

He felt a mad surging of his blood as a realization throbbed and throbbed through his brain that at last he was to come fully into his own. Here was what was meant for him; and what was meant for him must be taken. Instinct backed by countless generations told him what he must do—and it was characteristic of him that he wasted no time.

His eyes went to a comely she-wolf whose sharp cry reminded him of the one he had heard that other night. Alertly he took in the fact that she was running between two muscular males; also, that the latter pair were at odds and striving for her favor. The fur along his thick neck ruffled as she gazed at him—and once more a slice of unearthly fury escaped.

There was not even a cry, this time, and perhaps the silence of it accentuated the unexpectedness. There was simply a flash of an ugly, ungainly gray form; a widening of abnormally long jaws; a dexterous click of ivory fangs. Pandemonium was supreme for a moment—but only for a brief moment. Serenity came miraculously. A body hurtled through the air and dropped, limp; another did the same, the slight difference being that this one gurgled and twitched for a mere fraction of a second before becoming inert; then the gray mass disintegrated, quite hastily, and Beaut' stood alone—alone with the female by his side. He had killed the two most formidable males of the pack, and a mob does not care to turn on an unquestioned ruler!

For a delirious fortnight, Beaut' led that ravenous, hunger-crazed horde. It was a period of action and plenty. With his inherent cunning, coupled with that which had come from association with Boileau, he supplied his subjects with sufficient sustenance.

The wild things suffered—but that is the law. The fur-hunters suffered—and that is even more just. He could pick a trail with a cleverness uncanny; he could foil the traps with an ease that bordered on wizardry. That is truly putting it gently. At least, if it is right to judge by the sulfurous comments of various humans who stood the losses!

It is understood that Beaut' must have enjoyed his leadership, but he was primarily of a disposition that preferred after all to run alone. Added to this he shortly discovered that the glory of being a sovereign has another side. It impeded his own movements; it burdened him with responsibility; most vital, it brought perils to him that alone he would never have met.

Indeed, when one white night a youthful member of the pack sent forth an excited cry at the wrong moment, Beaut' made his decision. No sooner had three of his followers dropped from the rifle-fire the noise had invited, than the shrewd leader was off through the woods. He was traveling, too, at the fastest pace the mate by his shoulder could possibly make!

Just a scant week of his new life did for Beaut'—a week of running with his mate, of feasting upon his power, of exploring the strange wilderness. Then, gradually, a change came; a change that would cause him to lie peering into the distance, forgetful even of the female by his side. His eyes would be drawn very fine, and occasionally, quite unconsciously, he would lift a lip and bare a fang with an ugly little snarl.

The oddness of the free existence had worn off—and the wolf was a glorious hater. He went to the extreme in everything, and his feeling toward Boileau had been dominant since birth. He had picked up the scent of his enemy, one morning on the trail, and all the old venom came back.

Also, it came with added strength, for had he not already tasted the joy of vic-

tory? He would beat the human—he would have his life—as he had had the lives of all who had dared to pit themselves against him these last few weeks in the forest!

This, anyway, is Bad Boileau's and Beaut's story, and it is better to narrate the continuation of their combat without waste of time. Now, coupled with his former sheer bravery, the animal owned a far, far craftier knowledge of life. Perhaps, too, he had learned the value of taunting an enemy—as he himself had been treated by the Canadian.

Be that as it may, he started his campaign with almost staggering coolness and thoroughness. Assisted by his wily mate, he took in a good twenty miles of his opponent's trap line. The outcome is history; it is still mentioned, and frequently. The loss was the greatest any trapper had ever experienced on a single occasion. Every steel snare was sprung; every captive hide was ruined! Yes; Beaut's first blow was prodigious!

Boileau was not given to showing his anger—before men. This time he lost all his vanity, and his shame. And he could be foul when he wanted to, at that. His helper records that he took some of it out on his dogs; more, that he literally tore at his close-curled mass of raven hair.

He cooled down, though, and that sinister and cruel smile visited his lips and eyes. Naturally he recognized the marauder. Presently the Indian tells that he was immensely pleased; he repeated as he rubbed his big hands that it would be all the sweeter when he finally won. *Dieu;* but the payment he would exact! He set about the effort of collection by laying a masterly string of traps. No novice was he, either. No; he was justly called an expert!

Undoubtedly the Canadian had made a mistake—the usually fatal one of failing to adequately credit his adversary. Even when it was further drilled into him, he stubbornly refused to perceive it. He insisted, when he discovered that every snare and pitfall had been scornfully uncovered, that it was but luck—exasperating, stupid luck.

Withal, his next effort was more careful; it reached artistry. Considering the outcome, it would have been nicer left undone—for the trapper. His work was exposed quite as sweepingly as before. Heaped on this, several choice skins were mangled beyond hope. Assuredly Beaut' was forcing the fighting—and inflicting punishment!

From then on there was no let up in hostilities. They gained a momentum, an intensity that must have racked the nerves of the participants. But the wolf was holding best; he was the one who was forcing his adversary to make every first move. Ruthlessly he bared every trap, and Boileau's curses became prolific while the devil arrived to stay in his black, blood-streaked eyes.

Beaut', however, was not satisfied; rather, this first phase of the battle shortly ceased to content him. From hiding he had seen the big Canadian, and he knew that he had jarringly upset him.

Still, it was not enough; it was not what he wanted. A rage that verged on madness, a rage that well-nigh made his cool brain reel, came to him every time he saw his enemy or even discovered his scent. It was a ghastly hate, a steadily consuming one—a hate that could be satiated only by death!

Beaut' switched his tactics—completely. With his mate, he took to stalking Bad Boileau. Here, again, he was at an advantage. No human, even though he be the master woodman that the trapper was, can infallibly detect a wild thing.

True, the wolf was aware that his enemy, at various times, felt that he was being followed. This was apparent from the way the man would often suddenly stop and spin about, his face drawn as he held his rifle ready.

Oh, yes; the wolf realized this. Indeed, for a long month he was unable to obtain even the slightest chance of a safe spring at his quarry. Safe it must needs be, above all. Beaut' was too well acquainted with his former owner's speed and deadly weapons to spoil his hopes on a risky gamble!

At last the trapper succeeded in getting in a telling thrust. On the other hand, perhaps the very fact of it being so powerful

a one worked against him. At least, it surely served to season an already hot concoction. Dealing the final blow to a captured lynx, one afternoon, Boileau happened to glance up. It was one of those things that just happen; it was one of those things that possibly is staged by fate. Considering everything—what has passed and what followed — this opinion seems passable.

Anyway, his sharp eye detected, on a ridge a good two hundred yards away, the blurred outlines of two grayish heads. Remember that Boileau was quick; remember that Boileau was uncanny with his high-powered rifle. To do what he did he must have been; the proof is indisputable.

Briefly, his weapon was snatched from where it stood against a near-by tree, it was at his shoulder, his cheek and eye flashed to position—and when the bullet spat out one of the heads disappeared with a backward lurch that meant a hit! Massive though he was in bulk, Boileau truly made the distance in startling time. Getting there, though, his anger was apoplectic. He had killed the female!

He vented his spleen grossly on the dead body—grossly and at length. Finally he desisted, and as he trooped back to his sled there was that gruesome joy in his eyes that had not been there for months. He was telling himself that he had taken a trick that would eventually give him the game—for of a certainty it would sadly ruffle the nerve and brain of his antagonist! *Dieu;* but the outlook was pretty!

In one sense, Boileau was right. The nerves of his enemy were affected. They were not, as he had counted, shaken; they were more tautly but firmly strung. He felt the loss—the loss of the only mate he had ever known. Even so, his terrible hate must be borne in mind, and the blow simply furnished fuel.

His efforts were increased; indeed, night and day he thought of Boileau, dreamed of Boileau, gloried in the picture of the time when he would have his fangs at the other's jugular. He followed him, now, continually; and he followed him with a caution that was fairly magical. Still, not one opportunity came that offered even a half-way chance at a final attack!

Beaut' was several times on the point of cracking—of blindly jumping in when doom would be certain. Always, though, he steeled himself and fought the impulse off. He had noticed—as he had noticed when he had been leading Boileau's string of dogs—that the trapper had one never-failing habit.

Whenever he found an animal in his toils —especially a larger animal—he would lay his rifle against the first tree at hand. Then he would walk forward and cut down a long, slim branch. This he would sharpen until the end was pinlike. Then, with that glint in his eyes that Beaut' loathed, he would torture his prey. It is horrible, and it is not pleasant to dwell on—but the wolf remembered occasions when the man had made sightless his victim!

One must not forget that Beaut' was possessed of an unusual brain; one must also consider that he had absorbed the tactics of Boileau from his long relationship with the man. Anyway, suddenly an idea came to the wolf—an idea that would settle his problem once and for all—an idea that would either effect his own death or that of his odious opponent.

Gamely he took the risk. Springing perhaps the best trap that Boileau had ever set, he buried it deep in the snow. After that, he stuck his left hindfoot out of sight, between the harmless and closed steel jaws, and stretched the chain to its limit. Then commenced the hardest part of his long battle—the grim wait, the tense wait, for the last whim of fortune!

Even to Beaut', with his excellent control, the wait must have seemed treble or more than the actual time. From all that can be known, it was a period embracing between three and four hours.

Then came the faint sound of the approach of Bad Boileau. The wolf undoubtedly went through the greatest strain of it all until the man appeared. When he did, some sort of relief must have accompanied him. He arrived with his Indian helper—and if the latter has recounted the event once, he has done so some hundred full times!

It is needless to go exhaustively into his tale; hearers always urge him on and perhaps justly damn his drooling. Pithily, it amounts to this:

Boileau's ghoul-like glee, when he saw, made the Indian blink tight; Beaut's perfect calm, through the whole, made him gasp his homage. Indeed, he vows that when his employer, doing his trick of sharpening his stick, gloated so fiendishly, he himself felt the desire to attack the man from behind.

He says, however, that he was held—actually hypnotized—to see the end of the implacable feud. It came, he assures, with a surprising suddenness that sent the heart pumping up around the regions of the roof of the mouth. Boileau approached; the wolf tautened. Boileau slowly prodded in with his stick, chuckling in a high, shrill way that was new!

Here is where the story becomes jumbled. The Indian insists that he had known speed—that he had known human fury and animal fury. Seeing that he had known the two characters we are dealing with, we should be inclined to believe him.

He informs us, however, that the thing he witnessed is beyond all ken and beyond all description. He swears that the leap of the wolf can be likened to nothing but forked lightning; he goes on to say that the horrible cry of the trapper sent that grisly itch over his entire scalp; he ends by informing us that the next thing of which he was cognizant was that Bad Boileau was on the snow, his jugular ripped wide, and that 'Beaut' was not to be seen!

Always, after he has regained his inherent poise, he grunts—grimly grunts out the fact that he cannot help but be glad that the business ended exactly as it did. It is significant that there is not an old-timer who disagrees with him!

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THE SUNKEN SPANIARD

BY ETHEL TALBOT SCHEFFAUER

THE fight was over, the battle done
Before the setting of the sun,
And many a ship, as I well know,
Made her bed on the sands below.
And some that saw the stars at night
Had made their bed before the light.

The barnacles creep their ribs between,
And their sides are mossed with the seaweed green.
And the jewels drop from the rusted swords
In the skeleton hands of the sleeping lords.

The deep-sea fishes have nested in
The silken banner of Catherine.
The leaden feet of the centuries
Make spoil of the colored broideries.

Out of the deep came splendor and moan,
And the sea hath taken again her own.
Sorrow and splendor came from the sea
With the pearls sewn into the broidery.
And the wave that washes the seaward whin
Rolls over the lost Saint Catherine.

Comrades of Peril

by Randall Parrish

Author of "The Strange Case of Cavendish," "The Devil's Own," "When Wilderness Was King," etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STORY OF A PLOT.

IT was Macklin, burning with fever, delirious, yet partially conscious once more, uttering sounds which could hardly be distinguished as words, and struggling vainly to lift his body into an upright position. Through the dusk of the place he stared dully into Shelby's face, at first without recognition; then his eyes exhibited terror, and he endeavored to wrench away, cowering back against the rock wall, as though he beheld a ghost. The horror he felt gave volume to his voice.

"Good God!" he shrieked. "Am I dead? Is this hell?"

"No, Kid," and Shelby held him firmly, his tone full of sympathy. "Everything is all right. Lie still and don't worry."

"But who the hell are you? Ain't you Tom Shelby?" he laughed wildly. "Lord, no; he's dead!"

"That is where you are wrong, my boy. I'm Shelby, all right, but a long ways from being dead."

"You Shelby? Didn't he get you?"

"Well, yes, he got me, but not quite strong enough. I failed to stay got. You lie down and be still. Here, take a drink of this."

The fellow did as he was ordered, his hands shaking so that Shelby had to hold the bottle to his lips. Even as he drank greedily his eyes never deserted the other's face until the girl, creeping silently up behind, came also into his range of vision. Her presence seemed to give him a sense of reality.

"Say, this is too much for me," he said huskily, but lying back quiet, "the two of yer here. Just what's happened, enyhow? It was Pancha, wasn't it, who hauled me out o' that cabin? Well, where's Pancha—an' what the hell is this place I'm in?"

"Let me tell him, Tom," broke in Olga, pressing forward and lifting his head into her lap. "He will believe me, and he is afraid of you yet. You can hear what I say, Mr. Macklin?"

He nodded, his breath coming in gasps, his eyes on her face.

"Then listen closely. It will only take a moment to explain. You were shot—"

"Yes, yes," he stuttered, "I know; she did it."

"Oh, you saw then who fired. It was all a mistake, and she was so sorry. The bullet was meant for Indian Joe Laud, but you stepped in the way."

"For Laud? Pancha tried to kill Laud?"

"Yes; it was all on account of me. I—I seem to be causing a terrible amount of trouble; I hardly know why. You—you carried me off because you believed I had the right to some money, didn't you?"

His eyes brightened, but still with the dull glow of fever in them.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for September 6.

"Sure; you got it comin', too. But what's that got to do with Joe Laud? He wasn't noway hooked up in this game."

"Oh, yes he was. I'll explain all that. You told something to a man named Matt Hanley once."

"Me! Maybe I did when we was drunk tergether over at Gerlasche. I'd just found out 'bout it then. But he never remembered—Hanley didn't."

"Yes he did, and he kept watch on you ever since; he and a fellow Slagin. They were somewhere up the valley the night you brought me in here, and they knew what was up. They followed, meaning to get you put out of the way somehow, so they could get hold of me themselves. I guess they didn't have brains enough to make it. I don't know exactly what happened, but after Slagin got killed—"

"Hell! Was that what that guy came to the cabin for?"

"We suppose so; at least that was what caused Hanley to tell the story to Indian Joe Laud, and get him to take a hand. They tried to get the Mexican, Pancha's brother, to help them, but something brought on a quarrel, and Laud killed him. An Indian boy told Pancha, and she went crazy over you both. That was what brought her to the cabin."

"An' that ol' devil come there to get me, did he?"

"Yes; but first he tried to learn all he could—things Hanley didn't know—so he could make the job worth while. Then Pancha tried to shoot him and got you."

He struggled to speak.

"Say, lift me up a little more. That's it; something seems to fill up in my throat. You sure she didn't hear nothin' I said there—'bout leavin' her an' marryin' you?"

"I know she didn't."

"Lord, I'm sure glad o' that. I sorter thought that was what she plugged me for; that would be the Mex of it; they're hell on that sort o' thing. I like her, she's a good scout. Why ain't she here? Where is she now?"

"She has gone for a doctor; went down into the Hole to get a horse to ride."

"Where is she goin'?"

"Gerlasche; to an army surgeon."

"Yes, I know"—wearily—"an' where you got me?"

"In a small cave part way up the bluff."

"Sure, Eagle's Cave. Pancha took me up yere wunst an' showed it to me. An' you two lugged me all that ways?"

"Yes."

His eyes, grown heavy and dull again, wandered from face to face, as though unable to comprehend clearly. He forced back the obstruction in his throat.

"Well, what the hell did you do that for?" he asked almost savagely. "That's what I don't get through my nut. I ain't done nuthin' to make either one of yer decent ter me. I thought Shelby here was deader 'n a door nail, an' I reckon you know what I was aimin' ter do with you. There ain't no use beatin' about the bush. So now, what 'd yer do it for?"

Shelby's hand reached out and touched that of his wife.

"Well, Kid, I'll tell you," he said frankly, "we did it for Pancha."

Macklin grinned grimly, exposing his teeth.

"I reckoned that was 'bout the truth," he said recklessly. "You ain't no soft mollycoddle, Tom Shelby, to be sheddin' tears over me. But I'll tell yer one thing—Pancha's never goin' ter get back before I slide out. I got what's comin' to me, an' there ain't no doc ever goin' ter hold me back from goin'—that's straight, ol' man."

"I'm not so sure, Kid."

"Well, I am. Lord, a man generally knows when he's got his dose, I reckon; an' it ain't goin' ter do nobody no good fer me ter keep my lips shut. Say, lady, you let your man put his shoulder back o' me an' hoist me up higher. It is gettin' a hell of a hard job to breathe. There, now maybe I can get this thing off my chest."

"You want to explain something?"

"Sure; didn't I tell you. I ain't goin' ter leave this game wide open fer Indian Joe to cash in on. You been decent to me, an' I'll play white as I can. I got on ter this down in Gerlasche 'bout two months ago, an' been figurin' it out ever since, off an' on."

He spoke slow, hesitatingly, as though his mind wandered, stopping every moment or

two for breath. Once he coughed sharply, an expression of pain on his face, but he went grimly on.

"I'd been on considerable of a bat down there, an' was soberin' up. You know the Custer House?"

"Yes—the old hotel."

"Well, it ain't no palace; you could throw a cat through them partitions in places; an' I woke up to hear a couple o' guys talkin' in the next room. Furst I didn't care a damn what they was sayin', an' then I begun to take an interest. Seems one of 'em was a lawyer from Kansas City, or Omaha; an' the other gazaboo was a rich guy from down East, who was hunting a niece who had disappeared out in this country—the name was Churchill—"

"Is your name Churchill?"

"Mine! Not in a thousand years. That was all a damned lie. Well, as near as I could get hold of the story, this yere girl's mother was nursin' in Richmond durin' the war an' fell in love with a Yank an' married him. She never knowed she was no heiress, an' didn't dare go home 'cause she'd married a Yank. Her people didn't get on to it for a long while, an' then, I reckon, they didn't get the story straight. Maybe they didn't try very hard—enyhow she'd dropped plum outer sight. Later they found out somehow that she'd married a regular army officer named Carlyn, an' gone West with him. I dunno just what delayed 'em after that, but afore they got these folks located the woman died, leavin' a little girl, an' her husband—he was a colonel by that time—put her into a church school.

"It took 'em a while to find that out, an' even then they couldn't learn where the school was—or, leastways, didn't. I reckon maybe the guy Chruchill wasn't in no hurry to turn over the coin. Meanwhile the colonel got on to some extent an' began to make inquiries down East; but before he accomplished much he got mixed up one night in a street fight down in Sheridan, an' would have been killed if it hadn't been for a sergeant he had with him named Calkins. He got him home alive, but he croaked later. That left the kid alone at school, but these folks didn't know where."

"It was in St. Louis."

"Sure they found out later, but by that time she'd gone. This yere old sergeant, Calkins, had come with a power of attorney, or something, an' got her out. That's where I furst begun to get real interested—after this fellow Calkins got into the game. I'll tell yer why I got it into my nut that maybe I'd hit a hot trail, where, if it panned out all right, there might be some boodle in it for me. I run steers for the XL about four months once, an' we used to drift into Ponca to blow ourselves. I knowed there was an ol' fellow hanging 'round there, in McCarthy's place mostly, a sorter tin-horn sport, they called Ol' Dad Calkins; an' I'd heard somewhere he had a girl livin' with him 'bout seventeen or so. Somehow I got to mullin' over this, an' finally decided to see what kind of a lead I'd struck. It looked like easy money, if she was the girl, an' didn't know yet what was up."

"You went to Ponca for that purpose?"

"Just prospectin' like. Drifted in, huntin' a job, an' then hung 'round till I got my bearin's. Them other two guys went off somewhere else, an' so I had easy sailin'. I couldn't get next the girl at all. I reckon she never left the shack; but I got a look at her, an' it wasn't no trouble to pick up an acquaintance with Old Dad. He was damned tight-mouthed, though, drunk or sober, an' finally I had to throw the fear of God into him to make him spill!"

"You mean you threatened him?"

"Yep! I never supposed it would shake the guts out of him the way it did, though. The old fool went plum batty when I told him what I knowed. He thought I was after him—a detective, or something—an' he just crumbled up, without makin' no fight at all. I reckon he'd been hidin' her so long, he just naturally got it into his nut he was guilty of some hell of a crime. Enyhow, the next thing I knowed he'd gone out back of the dance-hall an' shot himself."

He stopped, shaken by a paroxysm of coughing. Shelby held him tightly, and finally this passed away, the man resting weakly in his arms.

"I used to talk all right," he whispered hoarsely, gasping for breath, "an' I could warble some, too. Say, did you ever hear me sing?"

"Yes, Kid, I've heard you."

"Sure you did. Everybody said I had a wonderful voice. Trouble with me is I never ain't had no show. If I could ha' got started in opera, I'd never been out yere getting plugged by no Mex woman. It's hell, ain't it? But, say, where was I, enyhow?"

"You just explained why Calkins killed himself."

"Oh, yes, that's it. Well, o' course I felt bad about the ol' man, but it wasn't no fault o' mine. Then it seemed like his shufflin' off put the cards right in my hand. It sure proved she was the girl, an' now she was left plum alone, it didn't look no awful hard job for me to shine up an' marry her before enybody else got wise. Say, I had it all figured out when you an' Dan McCarthy horned in on that fool stunt of yours an' knocked my game galley-west. Whose idea was it?"

"The preacher from Buffalo Gap suggested the plan first."

"Darn if I didn't think it was that big stiff. Well, enyhow, it left me holdin' the bag. Then I cottoned onto that job with you. I didn't' aim to stay out there punchin' steers, but just thought I'd see how things turned out. I sorter figured it this way: The girl, she didn't care nothin' for you; she just married yer ter get outer there an' hav' some place ter live; an' maybe, out there on the Cottonwood, I could make love to her, an' some day we'd skip out together. That's as far as I went at furst, an', goin' out over them prairies, I got it into my head that she didn't have no objection to a little flirtation. I was feelin' quite foxy about it when we got to the ranch."

He stopped and waited, as though the effort to talk was almost too much for his strength, but neither of the listeners spoke. The lashes drooped low over Olga's eyes and her cheeks burned.

"Then I reckon the devil must ha' took charge o' the game, fer the minute I was left alone out there I run into a bunch o' Indian cattle thieves. I knew two of 'em, for they were out of the Hole here, an' all at once it struck me I might just as well have the job over with. I took it she didn't care a damn about you, an' that a little strong-arm stuff would pan out all right. It works with most women. I didn't have no notion then of bumping you off, Shelby, but the buck who took that job cracked you good an' hard. I sure thought he'd done the business, for when I felt of you, you was sure cold."

"It was a cool night."

"I reckon that must have been it. Well, that makes the whole story, don't it?"

He shut his eyes, his head falling back in complete exhaustion. Only his labored breathing proved that Macklin still lived. Olga held him motionless in her lap, bending over and softly smoothing back his hair with one hand. Shelby left them there, creeping out through the entrance onto the rock platform without.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HAND TO HAND.

IT had ceased snowing, but enough had fallen to cover the bluff with a white mantel, obliterating the trail, and leaving the valley below covered. The sky arched over all dull and gray. Shelby hung out over the ledge, watchfully studying the view outspread beneath.

It was a peaceful scene enough, with scarcely a moving figure visible. He could hardly realize that this was the haunt of outlaws, where only a few hours before he had been desperately struggling for life. The daylight revealed no sign of disorder or pursuit, the only reminder of what had occurred being the blackened ruins of the burned cabin almost directly below. Yet this was deserted, and the snow about appeared untrampled. The sight gave him hope, yet he felt strangely depressed and unnerved. The remembrance of the scene just witnessed could not be cast off. He had no reason to question the truth of that confession, and it had impressed him strongly. Macklin was evidently dying—was already beyond help. Any breath might prove to be his last, and it was even then too late for any doctor to save him.

But would Pancha return in time to assist them? Would she bring sufficient help with

her? In spite of the ominous quiet below, he felt no faith that Indian Joe would so easily abandon their trail. He was not that kind. Something would assuredly arouse his suspicion that they had not perished in the flames. Indeed that could be easily ascertained by a search of the débris, and the perturbed ranchman was far from being satisfied that Pancha alone knew of this secret trail. Why, Macklin stated he had himself been up as far as the cave; and it was scarcely likely it had been entirely overlooked so long by these others—the Indians certainly must have scoured every inch of these bluffs at one time or another. Something, for the moment, may have drawn aside suspicions of his escape, yet those devils would track him down. The conviction haunted him.

He drew back just in time. There was the sharp crack of a rifle; a bullet chipped the outer edge of the parapet, and a little puff of smoke curled up away to the left and vanished against the leaden sky. Shelby fell flat on his face and crept backward, seeking instinctively the protection of an overhanging rock, his eyes instantly marking that vague spiral of smoke. He had guessed right. Indian cunning had already learned the truth, and had found means of approach unknown even to the Mexican girl.

Somewhere in the security of those rocks keen eyes were watching every movement, savagely eager to end all by some well-directed shot. Yet, with the chug of the bullet, all depression left him. He knew now what he had to face; that narrow platform must be defended, for hours probably, revolvers pitted against rifles; himself alone against an unknown number of assailants. It meant caution as well as bravery, the quick wit of a white man outgeneraling savage treachery. Even as he rolled over, so as to cautiously lift his head, the .45 was jerked from its holster and rested ready in his hand. He heard Olga at the cave entrance, yet never looked around.

"Stay back!" he ordered sternly. "Don't venture out here yet."

"But what is it? I heard a shot."

"Yes; they have found us all right. One fellow has the range of those outer rocks. I am not sure just where he is; then, no doubt, there are others. Hand me another gun; I may need both. Did Macklin have one?"

"Yes; it is still at his belt."

"Get it, and with whatever cartridges he may have. This is going to be a fight at short range. How is the fellow?"

"I—I am sure he must be dying, Tom," she said breathlessly. "He scarcely breathes any more. I have to bend down to be sure. I—I don't think it can do him any good for me to stay in there. Isn't there any way I can help?"

"Only by doing what I asked; get his gun. This is bound to be some fight. I don't know how many are out there; the bird who shot at me is behind that rock yonder; he's Indian, all right; you can glimpse his scalp-lock just over the edge. Likely they know we haven't any rifles up here, an' so are liable to get careless. If he would only shove his nut up about half an inch more, I'll show him that a .45 ain't such a bad weapon when you know how to use it."

He advanced, his revolver-barrel across the top, and lay motionless, sighting along the smooth steel.

"Now, boys, you do that again. Can't make out exactly where I have gone, can you? Well, you are going to find out in about a minute." His grip tightened. "Ah, there you are!"

His finger pressed the trigger, sending forth a spurt of flame. A brawny red arm was flung up, the hand gripping at the rock for support; then a rifle went crashing down into the chasm, and the next instant an Indian whirled head downward, the body striking a narrow ledge and bouncing off into space. Three shots answered the crack of the revolver so swiftly as to seem echoes, the bullets striking the solid rock wall, one, crushed out of all shape, dropping directly in front of Olga, crouching in the entrance. Shelby laughed, but with eyes stern and watchful.

"Three more located," he said pleasantly. "Seem to have us pretty well trapped. I'd like to know how they got up here without using the trail." He turned over and looked behind, searching the face of the

bluff uprearing above them. "So they don't get up there it will be all right, and it is up to me to keep 'em below. I thought you were goin' after that extra gun?"

"I am, Tom, but I can't stay in there. I want to be out here with you."

"Why, I ain't in a mite o' danger, little girl. Those reds can't shoot through this rock. Of course they ain't goin' to stay where they are forever, peckin' away blindly. When they take chances I'm bound to get some of 'em, if I keep my eyes open. But all I got to do is lie here quiet an' take 'em on the jump."

"But suppose they rush in on you?"

"It don't hardly look reasonable. Still, o' course, they might try it, if they got a white leader. Indians never would do it themselves; it's liable to cost too heavy."

"That is why I am coming back," she insisted. "I told you I could shoot."

"All right," he grinned cheerfully, "come along, then; only you keep down out of the way and let me do the sniping. I reckon even you will acknowledge I am some better at that. There, now, you lost me a shot! Did you see that buck dodge between those two rocks? He'll try that trick again presently."

Olga came back, creeping out cautiously and finding a place slightly behind where he lay. She held to one weapon, laying the other on the rock, together with a belt filled with cartridges.

Shelby barely swept his eyes toward her, his whole attention concentrated on what was occurring below. Something was taking place down there, but exactly what could not be immediately determined. He had perceived men moving beyond range, dodging along from rock to rock, mere glimpses of dark figures, yet plainly enough Indians. Once he was almost sure he distinguished a white man, through a rift in a gully, but the fleeting view gained was not convincing. Nevertheless he had no doubt but what there were white men present.

The method of attack was too bold and determined for savages alone; it was not the Sioux idea of war. Besides, the one man who would have a real object in this assault would be Laud. Beyond all question it was he who was behind the effort, urged on by personal hatred, as well as a desire in gain possession of Olga. Shelby wondered what the fellow might know. Could he be aware of the escape of Macklin and that Pancha had ridden forth in search for help? If he did, that might account for his desperate eagerness to overcome resistance before she could return. Yet, probably not, for if he did know, the coward in him would cause him to seek flight before he could be cornered in this place.

It was far more likely he believed himself opposed merely by Shelby and the girl, armed with a revolver or two, and having a limited supply of ammunition. He saw little peril in the adventure, and figured that a quick, sharp rush, his warriors leaping from covert to covert, would win an easy victory. He would keep up a steady rifle-fire from behind the rocks, forcing the defenders to keep under cover, and then suddenly send a charging party to end the affair.

Shelby smiled grimly at the mental picture, never turning his head as he spoke to the silent girl beside him.

"How's Macklin?"

"Dead, I think, Tom. He didn't seem to breathe even faintly."

"The poor devil; it will be mighty hard on Pancha, though. You got your gun?"

"Yes."

"All loaded, I reckon; if not, you better fill it up. There is goin' to be hell to pay presently. When I say so, you let drive. Keep down out o' sight till then, but when you begin to pump, make her act like a Gatling."

"But can't those riflemen see you there?"

"Well, it don't look much like they can the way they are pepperin' that rock. Nice little tune the bucks are playin'. That's what makes me think something's up; they aim to keep us down out o' sight, so we won't glimpse what's comin'. 'Tain't Indian nature to waste lead that way. Laud's back there somewhere playin' this game. I think I got sight of the sneakin' cuss a minute ago, but he was out of range."

"You believe they intend to try and get up here?"

"That's my present notion; they don't look for much trouble, either. It is up to

us to give that outfit the surprise of their lives."

She reached out her hand and found his as it rested on the belt of cartridges."

"Tom!"

"Yes," he answered without removing his gaze from the trail below.

"Don't worry about me," she said earnestly. "You know what I mean; don't think about me when they do come. I'll take care of myself, all right."

He cast a quick glance into her face.

"Sure I know you will. You are a trump, a good pardner. I thought that for a long while. You won't forget what I just told you."

"I'll not forget."

There was a moment of silence and then she spoke again, a sharp little catch in her voice:

"Tom!"

"Yes."

"I—I don't know what is going to happen. I—I am not afraid, but—but it seems to me I—I would like to have you kiss me once more first—you only have once, you know."

Shelby turned his body about, leaving his cocked revolver lying on the stone, and caught both her hands eagerly.

"Lord, I'm glad to hear you say that, little girl!" he exclaimed, his eyes aglow. "I reckon I've been sorter half afraid o' you. But I ain't goin' to be any more; you sure mean it, don't you?"

Her eyes looked honestly, earnestly into his, answering him before her lips spoke:

"With all my heart, Tom."

He drew her slowly toward him, forgetful of all else. Then a rifle spat viciously and a ball struck the edge of the parapet, sending a small splinter of stone flying past them.

It was a long, nerve-racking wait, during which they rested side by side, intent on every movement below, but finding little opportunity for action. Occasionally they spoke, but generally remained silently watchful. The Indians kept up a desultory fire, and behind its screen were evidently making a change of position, yet so stealthily as to be hardly observed. They exposed themselves freely enough beyond pistol range, proof that they were fully aware of the caliber of the weapons confronting them, but closer in the savages crept from rock to rock invisible.

Twice only did Shelby succeed in getting a fair shot—once clipping a scalp-lock from an incautiously exposed head, and again winging a brave who recklessly attempted to leap across a narrow opening. This fellow dropped in the open trail, wounded in the thigh, and unable to drag himself to shelter, and soon a sinewy red arm reached out from behind a rock in an effort at rescue. This was withdrawn quickly as a speeding bullet struck within an inch of the outstretched hand. The injured warrior lay there twitching with pain.

The minutes dragged into half an hour, the strained nerves of the defenders on edge. Olga was trembling from head to foot, struggling to retain self-control, Shelby never relaxing a muscle, or averting the steady gaze of his eyes. Suddenly he rose to his knees, a revolver gripped in either hand.

"There's Laud now," he announced simply. "They're coming!"

She saw the fellow also, lifting her head to peer over the low rim of rock, standing in the open trail, but just beyond range. He held a rifle in his hands, which he swung above his head, at the same instant giving utterance to a hoarse shout. It must have been a signal, for instantly those rocks were black with half-naked figures, leaping madly forward, with rifles flung in air, and giving utterance to fierce yells. It was a wild race, but the steep ascent to the cave halted them.

The two above, reckless now of exposure, fired as swiftly as they could press trigger, straight into the red faces. Some fell, shot down in their tracks, a few paused to reply, but the majority began to clamber up. Laud ran forward to join them, roaring out his orders. He was in full view against the snow-covered trail, and Shelby swung his smoking muzzle down upon him. To the crack the fellow flung up both hands, whirled about, and crumbled into a shapeless heap. Shelby, scarcely realizing the success of his quick shot, staggered back, reversed the gun in his hand, and struck

with the butt at the first Indian head appearing above the platform. It was hand to hand.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A BATTALION OF THE SIXTH.

PANCHA vanished into the fog, wading along the creek, and finally creeping out below the burned cabin. If there were any guards left there they were not encountered, and the mists hung so thick at that early hour she took few precautions to avoid them. Her one thought was Macklin; love had conquered hate and the desire for revenge. Vengeance for her brother's death could wait, but not aid for the wounded man. She hoped she might not meet Indian Joe, for that would only delay her mission. He might suspect, interfere with her departure, even hold her prisoner. Yet now there was a chance of success for her mission.

The débris had not been searched over; it could not have been, for the fire still smoldered, but the moment the Indians were able to overhaul the wreck they would discover that their victims had, in some way, escaped. There would be no charred bones, no singed flesh, to tell of dead bodies consumed in the flames; they would not even find Macklin's remains. And Laud was no fool. The truth, in some form, would come to him at once; he would know they had got safely away; nor would he ever stop until he again found them. He was a white Indian, remorseless, vengeful, unhampered by any scruples, realizing that the death of these enemies alone would mean his own safety. And he would suspect her; perhaps had seen her face when she fired that fatal shot. Her only chance lay now before this revealment came.

She was cool, resourceful; had shrewdly thought out every step. If she was still unsuspected, no one would stop her. She had always been free to leave the valley. Often she had taken early rides, and none of the ordinary guards would consider her going forth as at all strange. Of course the Hole was filled now with strange fugitives—Indians hiding from the soldiers, suspicious of every white face. These might cause trouble, but she must take that chance. There was but one way to save Macklin's life—the doctor at Gerlasche. Shelby had told her so, and nothing else remained fixed in her mind. Mother of God, she would save him!

There were three horses in the little stable-shack back of the cabin. She crept cautiously up through the fog, unable to see in the gloom, but locating the animals by touch. One was still moist from riding, Laud's pony, no doubt. The next was her own, having scarcely stamina for such a trip, but the third was the bay Juan had always been so proud of. She felt the tears well into her eyes as he whinnied a welcome, but he was her choice—he would carry her until he dropped in his tracks.

She led the animal out, saddled and bridled him in the darkness, and then, mounting in the gray dawn, with a prayer in her heart for help and guidance, she rode slowly out into the trail. The billowing clouds of mist rose, giving a view ahead; she could hear the sound of distant water dashing down over the precipice; but seemingly no one else was astir. She touched the horse, and he broke into an easy gallop.

A fire burned in front of the little house beside the falls, a mere flicker of half-burned logs, with two men hovering over it. One of them started up at sound of the horse's hoofs and gripped a rifle. He was white, a flapping hat-brim shadowing his face. The other, an Indian, wrapped in a blanket, merely lifted his head and stared moodily. Her heart gave a sharp bound, but she reined up carelessly as the fellow stepped into the trail. He peered curiously into her face.

"Hell, young woman, you're out damned early, ain't you. What's up?"

There was nothing vicious in his greeting, and her heart quit its pounding.

"I am after a doctor, Sam," she said swiftly, believing boldness the best card to play. "My brother has been shot."

"Sure, I heard that, only they told me he was dead; he ain't, hey? Had a rumpus with Injun Joe, didn't he?"

"Yes; I just heard about it. He must have the doctor right away."

"Where the hell you aim to find one?"

"Over at Gerlasche. There is an army surgeon there."

"Sure, but I'm bettin' the cuss won't come, 'less he brings the whole army 'long with him. He'd have ter mosey in yere blindfold if he did."

"Just the same, he'll come, if I find heem," she said grimly, "for I'll bring heem dead or alive. Who's out there on the trail?"

"'Red' Haines an' Stumpy, 'long with a couple of Sioux. The boys are a bit jumpy just now with all them sojers scoutin' the Bad Lands. Maybe they'll try ter stop yer, but you tell 'em I said it was all right. Say, what was goin' on last night—shootin' ter beat hell up the cañon, an' there was quite a fire, too?"

"Row over the girl Macklin brought in," she explained calmly, "an' the old cabin got burned."

"Some more o' Injun Joe's cussedness, I reckon?"

"Yes, he was in it; well, adieu, Sam!"

She rode forward, never even venturing to glance back. Thus far everything had gone easier than she could have hoped. There were no orders out against her, and these night-guards were not even aware of what had taken place. She guided her horse under the veil of falling water, and up the steep bank beyond, out into the valley of the Cottonwood. There was little danger of meeting any one now she needed to avoid, and once beyond those watchers at the head of the trail the way would be open. She came upon these just below the crest, grouped for shelter under the ledge of an outcropping rock. Haines had been drinking and was in good humor, listening to her story with a broad grin, and dismissing her willingly enough.

"To hell, o' course yer kin go!" he said thickly. "Yer brother pulled me out o' the Cowskin wunst. He's a damn good scout for a Mex. Go to it, girl; you know the trail?"

"Yes, along the edge of the Bad Lands."

"Sure; better keep in the first gully, ere yer might run inter a sojer outfit. They're thicker than fleas out there now, they tell me. So-long, sister!"

It had begun to snow, big heavy flakes, drifting with the wind, quickly whitening the landscape. The slight marks of the trail were almost instantly obliterated, but the low range of hills ahead were a sufficient landmark, and she forced her horse into a swift pace—riding with her head lowered, but with watchful eyes peering through the snow curtain. She was alone now; free, with nothing intervening between her and Gerlasche. Her heart bounded with the elixir of success — she would bring back the doctor to Macklin. She felt no doubt any more.

The direct trail circled just within the outer range of the sand-hills, making it impossible for her to mistake the way even in that maze of snow. She rode more carelessly now that she was safely out of sight and free from any possibility of pursuit. The horse, with lowered head, seemed to feel the urgency, and plunged forward eagerly. They were in a narrow gap between the sandhills, the trail winding and twisting about, so as to reveal little of what might be ahead, the snow whirling into their faces blindingly. Suddenly, as they swept around a sharp corner, seeing and hearing nothing to warn of any other presence in that solitude, they came at full tilt against a halted column of cavalry. Before Pancha could even jerk up her reins a startled trooper had gripped the bit, and held her mount helplessly pawing the air.

"Well, what's this?" he growled, tugging at the frightened animal, and dragged half off his feet in the fierce struggle. "A Mex, by God! Say, fellows, this looks like Arizona. Lay hold here, Mapes! Call the sergeant somebody; I've got this bird! Whoa there! Now, what's all this about, young lady?"

"What is it, Summers?" the sergeant, pushing through the ring of men, peered curiously up at her from under the brim of a battered campaign hat.

"She just come a tearing in, sergeant, like she was goin' somewhere. She was sure ridin' like hell, an' she is Mex, all right."

"So I see. Well, *señorita*, what are you doing out here?"

His face was kindly, if stern.

"*Señor,* I ride for a doctor," she said earnestly. "Please do not stop me—a man is dying."

"A man? Where? Is he a Mexican?"

"No, *señor,* an Americano; he was shot; he verra bad; if I find no doctor he die maybe."

"But where are you going?"

"To Gerlasche, *señor;* there is army doctor there."

"Not now there ain't; he's back here with us somewhere. Where is this fellow who's hurt?"

She hesitated just an instant, yet there was no avoiding the truth. If the doctor was here, among these soldiers, she would have to tell the truth, or else desert Macklin to his fate. Besides what did she care; her hatred of Laud suddenly flaring into new life. Here was the opportunity for revenge, as well as service.

"In Wolves' Hole, *señor.*"

"Wolves' Hole! Good God! did you come from there? Pass the word for the major, some one. What's that? Oh, excuse me, sir," and he came stiffly to attention, facing a heavily-set, middle-aged officer, with iron gray mustache and goatee.

"What have you here, sergeant?" the latter asked briefly, "a Mexican woman?"

"Yes, sir; she just ran into us at full tilt. She claims to be after a doctor to attend to a wounded American over in Wolves' Hole."

"Is that so. Perhaps this is good luck. Who is this American, *señorita*—some damn white renegade?"

"He man I love, *señor.*"

"O, that's it. Then perhaps we can do business. We've got a surgeon here with us. If you will show us a way to get into Wolves' Hole, I'll promise he'll take care of your man, all right?"

"You ask me to guide you?"

"That's the bargain. We have been trying to locate the place for two days. You see we don't know this country, for we just came up from Arizona, and the guide they gave us is a drunken fool—a half-breed traitor. Who is the leader of those outlaws?"

"Indian Joe Laud, *señor.*"

"I've heard of the brute. Judging from the way you looked then, he is no friend of yours."

"No, *señor;* I hate heem; he keel my brother; now he try to keel this man I tell you 'bout—he an' two more Americanos."

"Two more! This is becoming interesting, sergeant. Let's have the straight story, *señorita.* You want us to help these people—is that it?"

"*Si, señor;* it is nothing to me what you do. I care for them not at all; they not my people any more. There are many there now—Indians a lot; they run there and hide."

"Yes, I know; but who are these Americanos? They belong to the gang?"

"No, *señor.* One was a woman, *señor;* young, pretty woman; she captured and brought there. Eet was her husband that try to save her. He follow an' git in some way, like the mother of God help. Hees name was Shelby."

"Shelby?" broke in the sergeant, forgetful of the officer's presence in his surprise. "What Shelby? Was his other name Tom?"

"*Si, señor,*" and she turned her eyes on him. "You know this Tom Shelby?"

"Do I? Of course I do! You remember him, Major Hays. He was with us once in 'C' Troop; then later detailed with the scouts. He's up in this country I know. I ran into him down at Ponca when I came through there. Why, by God, that was his wedding day, and I saw the bride."

"You say these renegade devils have got them both there in the Hole?" broke in the major. "Prisoners?"

"They got away now; they hide in a cave," she explained.

"And you will show us the way in?"

"*Señor,* the doctor he will care for this man, if I do?"

"I pledge you my word he will."

"And you keel Indian Joe Laud, *señor?*"

"We'll surely do our best."

"Then I show you—yes; who that man there?"

Shaunessy wheeled about to face the fellow she pointed at, gripping him with one hand, and dragging him forth from among the circle of soldiers.

"This is the bird they gave us for a guide," he said shortly. "You know him?"

"He?" She gave vent to a bitter laugh. "That fellow Dull Knife; bad Indian, horse thief. Why they give you heem?"

"Hell knows. What 'll I do with the cuss, major?"

"Have a couple of men hold him under guard. We seem to be on the right track now; *señorita,* where is this Wolves' Hole?"

"Over there, not far; across the mesa. You come I show you. That be better first, *señor*—just you an' some others, so you can tell what to do. Maybe eet be better we go afoot, so we be not seen."

"On foot! You don't mean we are as near the place as that?"

"*Si, señor;* I show you."

A little handful followed her lead between the sand ridges out upon the open plain—the major, a lieutenant, the sergeant, and three men. She led them along a slight depression, sufficient to partially screen them from observation. The major still had his doubts, staring gloomily ahead, and observing no marks of guidance; apparently they were trudging forth across a dead level plain, stretching away for miles to a far-off range of blue hills. The steady fall of snow had ceased, although there were occasional flurries, driving sharply into their faces. Overhead the clouds hung low and gray. Hays swore under his breath, half convinced he was being made a fool of. Twice he started to speak, but held his tongue. The girl never turned her head, but moved straight forward.

She came to a slight ridge, and stopped suddenly, pointing.

"'Tis there, *señor,*" she said simply, "Wolves' Hole."

The astounded officer stood motionless, his mouth open, his eyes staring at the sight so unexpectedly revealed. For an instant he could not believe what he saw. Almost under his feet the precipice fell away into that tremendous gorge, the mantle of snow emphasizing its depth, but bringing out the black rocks in stern contrast.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "What a gulf! And not a sign to make you dream of its existence. I'd have sworn ten feet back this plain was a dead level for thirty miles. But how in Heaven's name do we ever get down there?"

"There is something going on, sir, up yonder in that cañon," spoke up the lieutenant eagerly. "Listen, those are rifles popping, and I can see white puffs of smoke through the glass. There's a fight going on down there."

"Damned if you ain't right, Boyd; they are certainly popping away rather lively. Cornered Shelby likely, and, as I remember the lad, he'll stay with them as long as he has a cartridge left. By jingo; we've got to get down, and clear this nest out. Where's the trail, *señorita?*"

"Over yonder to the left, *señor.* You take your glass, so. Now straight along the bank, where that cedar tree tops the edge. It stands all alone. You see what I mean?"

"Yes, beyond that out-cropping of stone; the trail goes down there?"

"*Si, señor;* but if you ride down, your soldiers, they know."

"They keep guard?"

"*Si, señor;* just below, out of sight, yet where they can see. When I come out they were under a rock shelf to keep off the snow. Maybe they there yet."

"How many?"

"Five, *señor;* two white and three Sioux."

He studied the spot carefully through the leveled field glasses, and then swept them inch by inch over the snow covered plain. He returned them to the case, and cast one more glance into the depths below.

"Very well, men," he said quietly, "we will return to the battalion."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BATTALION GOES IN.

SHAUNESSY, with ten men, were given the cutting out job, the major drawing up his command behind the sand-hills in readiness for a swift advance. The sergeant led his little force well to the right of where the outpost was believed to be, and finally dismounted them, leaving two men in charge of the animals, while, with

the others, he proceeded forward on foot. The sand-hills approached much closer to the river at this point, and ridges extended out into the plain, affording them considerable protection as they cautiously advanced, seeking every possible bit of shelter. Shaunessy, using the field-glasses loaned him by the major, surveyed the ground carefully before venturing to lead the way, and, in this manner, the little party finally crept in behind the crest of land overlooking the valley of the Cottonwood.

It had been the plan to drop silently over the edge of the bank, and work their way along, so as to attack the outlaws from the rear, thus rendering the escape of any impossible. But once there on the ground the slope was found to be far too abrupt for this purpose, and the idea had to be abandoned. The only other procedure was to creep along under the protection of the ridge, trusting to swiftness of attack. The sergeant examined the ground as best he might, and gathered the men closely about him.

"Now, you fellows," he said shortly, "keep tight to me, and when the time comes jump lively. Don't wait for anything, but go over. We can't afford to let one of those guys get away. Don't shoot unless you have to; but if you do, get your man. Now then, on your toes, bullies!"

He crept forward, inch by inch, watchful of everything in front. He never glanced back, for he knew his men, but his carbine was flung forward, cocked and ready. It was fifty yards to where the gnarled cedar protruded above the bank, but no sign of any movement greeted him until he had nearly reached that point. Then, suddenly, with no warning of any kind, a red, bloated face shoved itself up above the edge of the bank. The startled eyes looked directly into the muzzle of the carbine.

"Stop right there, buddy!" said the sergeant sternly. "Now, lads, over you go!"

They took the leap recklessly, some rolling down the steep slope, others finding some sort of foot-hold and rushing fiercely forward. The guard was taken by complete surprise, helpless most of them before they could even reach their feet, or grasp their weapons. One alone, a white man, started to run, but a trooper swung his carbine, and let it drive, the whirling weapon landing with full force on the fugitive's back, sending the fellow sprawling. Before he could regain his feet the soldier had him by the throat, and was crushing him into the dirt. Shaunessy backed his prisoner down to where the others stood sullenly.

"Five; that's the whole bunch," he said with satisfaction. "A very good job. Now, Gates, go up there and wig-wag the major."

Ten minutes later the advance files of the battalion topped the edge of the bluff, and began to slowly move down the steep trail. Hays expressed his approval.

Exceedingly well done, sergeant; got the whole outfit I see. Have your men bring up your horses. The girl tells us we have a free road now into the valley, so we will move right along. Quietly men, and keep your distance. Unsling carbines! Forward!"

They moved steadily at a walk, the troopers eagerly peering ahead, yet cautiously reining back their mounts. There was scarcely a tinkling of accouterments, as the long column of horsemen slowly advanced down the crooked trail toward the snow-covered valley far below. They could gain but glimpses here and there, as the narrow passage wound in and out among the rocks, and before the leading files reached the bottom, snow began to fall once more, the wind whirling the flakes into their faces, half blinding them.

Pancha, riding beside the major, led the way through the curtain to where the Cottonwood plunged over the rock precipice into the deeper gorge beyond. To her uplifted hand of warning the column halted, the Mexican girl leaning over to explain the situation ahead.

"It is a very steep grade," she said, "an' a sharp turn at the bottom, where the trail runs under the falls. On the other side is a log house, and they always keep a guard there, *señor*."

"And beyond?"

"The valley is open."

He tried to see through the snow squalls, but with little success.

"How heavy is the guard?"

"That I cannot tell, *señor*. There were but two men there when I came out. But the log hut is a saloon, and many may be there now."

"No one is likely to be between this point and that?"

"Not on watch—no; some one might be passing out; they come and go."

"Of course, we run that risk. The falling water makes noise enough to prevent our being heard, yet I think it may be best to use a scouting party. The only way we can trap those fellows into a fight is through a surprise. If they become alarmed they'll scatter, and find a way out before we can strike a blow. Isn't that your idea, captain?"

"Yes, sir; we've got to get in behind, and cut them off."

"I presume there is a back door to this Hole, somewhere, *señorita?*"

"Yes, *señor;* way down yonder, but it can only be made on foot."

"Then we've got the villians, if we only move secretly enough. Take a dozen men, and come along with me, captain. Dismount them. *Señorita,* it will be best for you to show us the way."

They disappeared into the curtain of falling snow, and cautiously advanced beneath the veil of overflowing water. The trail was deserted, nor, as they peered anxiously forth from behind the rocks, could they perceive any signs of life beyond. The outlines of the log house could be plainly discerned, the storm suddenly ceasing. The door stood open, smoke arose from the chimney, but no one was visible outside. The dull glow of an expiring fire appeared on the ground in front, but no guard was squatted about it. Evidently the fellows had retired to shelter. The major grasped all this in a glance, but what interested him most was the sound of steady firing some distance away. It came to him plainly above the roar of the falls, and could not be mistaken.

"They have either all gone inside," he whispered to Pancha crouching beside him, "out of the storm, or else they are over there where the fighting is. You hear those rifles?"

"Yes, *señor.*"

"You don't suppose some other outfit had got in here ahead of us, do you?" he asked anxiously.

"No, *señor,*" earnestly grasping his arm. "It is not that. I know; they fight up the cañon. Listen, eet is over there the sound. They try to capture Señor Shelby; if we go quick we save them; we wait, maybe all be dead. Now we get all in the rocks, so none get away."

"I see." He looked at her keenly; then stepped back to where the men were clustered. "Captain, scatter these lads out about that house there; move quickly, and see that no one gets away. Stiles, run back, and have the battalion move forward. Bring up our horses."

The men dashed forward in a half circle, the major, with Pancha at his shoulder advancing close behind them, his objective the open door. No sooner had they broken over when the alarm sounded; a muffled voice yelled excitedly; a rifle or two cracked; a soldier running rapidly, plunged forward on his face, and lay still. Then white and red surged crowding through the door, surprised, trapped, crazy to escape.

Only one among them dared the venture in face of those leveled carbines. A tall, gaunt, white renegade, with red whiskers, and one arm in a sling, his uninjured hand gripping a revolver, leaped from the front step in a reckless endeavor to get out of sight around the corner of the cabin. The major flung up his arm, and fired, the fellow whirling about in his stride, and stumbling as he fell. He got upon one knee again, and the "forty-five" spat twice viciously, before a trooper sent a bullet crashing into his brain. Hays felt the zipp of lead pass his face, but stood erect, unhurt. Behind him Pancha uttered a startled sob, and sank slowly into the snow.

He sprang back, and caught her, holding her head up on his knee, his eyes staring down into her white, upturned face. She breathed once—that was all; never spoke, never moved, except for the slight tremor of her slender form in his arms. The major laid her softly down, his own face drawn, and white with sudden passion, and strode across to where the slain outlaw lay in a

huddled heap. An instant he looked down at the brutal face, oblivious to all else.

"Damn you!" he muttered in useless rage. "I wish I'd killed you!"

Then he turned suddenly, the spirit of the soldier in the ascendancy.

"Deploy your men, Captain Giles," he commanded, his voice hard and stern. "Swing them into line. Leave a squad here under a sergeant. Lively, boys; that is one of our old lads fighting those devils over yonder. Now we're going to strike in, and, damn me, if I care if you never take a prisoner. Good! give me my horse. All ready, gentlemen? Bugler, sound the charge!"

They swept forward on a walk, then a trot, spreading out into long, double line, as they swung into the more open valley, riding knee to knee, the men bending forward in their stirrups, with left hand grasping the reins, the right gripping the short carbines. A hundred yards and they were at the gallop, a blue torrent, at the heels of their leader; tearing through weeds and underbrush, spurring recklessly into and over the creek, dashing up the other bank to the very foot of the bluff beyond. It was then the major saw the uselessness of it. He whirled with uplifted saber.

"Dismount! Horse-holders to the rear. Come on, lads!" he shouted, his voice pealing above even the thud of hoofs. "Get up there some way you terriers, and give those red devils hell!"

They came forward at a run, yelling as they came, and leaped in among the rocks, their carbines beginning to spit as they clambered upward. Overhead were scurrying figures, and spurts of black smoke, as the Indian rifles made answer.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE ROCK PLATFORM.

SHELBY had no time to think, or to even comprehend clearly what confronted him. There was a second in which he rammed a handful of cartridges into his empty gun; and then they were on him, a dozen Indians swarming up the face of the rock, and clutching for a hold on the parapet. He fired blindly straight into their faces, aware that another revolver cracked close beside his ear, yet with no opportunity to glance about. He saw assailants topple backward, clutching fingers release their hold, rifles flung high in air, and roll down the slope.

Savage yells blended into cries of death agony. He felt the clip of a ball in his shoulder and staggered back from the blow; a tomahawk grazed his wrist, and the quick slash of a knife ripped open a leg of his trousers, a red stain discoloring the opening. He had a glimpse of fierce, infuriated faces, of waving scalp-locks, of naked chests and arms. Fingers clutched at him, and he kicked himself free. Both guns empty, he battered away with the butts, smashing at every face he saw, no desire left but to kill, before he also was dragged down. He knew nothing of Olga, where she was, what she was doing—he only realized that he must stand there, and fight until they got him—she would keep one shot; she had pledged that.

And the devils made it, creeping far out over the gulf, and drawing themselves up beyond reach of his arm. One fell, going down with a howl of terror; a second was struck by a speeding bullet, dead ere he went whirling back into the air—but the third made it, creeping up onto the narrow platform, while others surging behind, knives gripped in their teeth. Shelby hurled his emptied pistol into the face of the nearest before the fellow could attain his knees, and grasped a discarded rifle which dangled over the stone coping. With one bound he was at the edge swinging this weapon as a woodsman might an ax, driving the iron stock against every head that appeared.

He staggered back, breathless, half-blinded by a wound over his eye, aware only that the front of the rock was swept clear, that not a savage was left for him to strike at. She touched him, and he whirled, thinking it another enemy.

"Don't, Tom, don't!" she begged. "Merciful Heaven! you are all blood. Look out there! Are those soldiers?"

He held up the flap of skin, and stared where she pointed. Across the white snow

covering the valley below, riding stirrup to stirrup in a wild charge, two lines of cavalry were sweeping straight toward the foot of the bluff. He knew what they were at a glance; their steady lines even at a gallop, the spurring officer in front, the glitter of carbines, the silence, left no doubt. No Indians rode like that. He watched them, grasping her tightly to him now, scarcely able to speak. Once only, he gave utterance.

"My God! See those fellows ride!"

"They are soldiers?"

"Yes, yes! Good Lord, lassie, but that looks like old Hays leading 'em. It's the Sixth, the Sixth—a battalion of the Sixth!"

He staggered to his knees, but still held himself up, peering over the coping. She knelt beside him, half-supporting him against her shoulder. The charging horsemen swept in out of sight below, but they could hear them crash through the underbrush, and splash their way across the stream. Then there echoed up to them the ringing cheer of white voices, and the dull bang of the carbines.

How they made that ascent it is doubtful if a trooper knows; but they did, creeping from rock to rock, dragging themselves along gullies, hauling their bodies up by sheer strength of arm, springing from point to point—inch by inch, foot by foot, fighting as they advanced, firing at every skulking figure in their front, skirting precipices, leaping across chasms, clinging desperately to every rock or shrub, their carbines spitting viciously, eager only to get at hand's grips with the foe.

High above, Shelby and Olga caught glimpses of toiling figures, of leaping jets of flame, of fierce struggles hand to hand, of Indians seeking to escape. Sharp-voiced rifles answered the carbines, and a dead soldier hung dangling over the edge of a rock; another nursed a bleeding arm in the shelter of a cedar. But the unhurt came on. Some among them had stumbled onto the trail, for soon a squad appeared just below.

They stopped and turned over the body of Laud, so as to see the man's face; then tramped forward paying no heed to the dead Indians. Shelby recognized the major among them, and rose to his feet with difficulty, supporting himself with one arm about Olga's shoulder. The major was panting from the exertion of the climb, never glancing up until brought to a halt by the rock, its foot littered with the dead bodies of savages.

"Good God! look here," he exclaimed excitedly. "Those devils were paying the price." He choked and coughed. "Whew! that sort of thing winds me. Must be getting old, sergeant, yet, by Jove, I passed the test two weeks ago." He cast his eyes upward, and saw the two standing just above him. "Hello, Shelby! we are here in time then. Some good fighting my boy. Here, a couple of you give me a lift. I'll never make it alone."

He was hoisted over the stone coping, instantly straightening up, and warmly gripping Shelby's hand.

"Not badly hurt I judge, lad?"

"No, sir; chipped here and there is all, and have lost some blood."

"Mighty glad of that. By God, you are an honor to the regiment." He turned about, and stared down the bluff, his eyes brightening with appreciation. "Talk about your Alpine Chasseurs; those fellows of mine could give pointers to a mountain goat. Just look at them come up there. By the way, Shelby, we've got a surgeon back there somewhere. If you don't need him yourself, you've got a wounded man here who does, at least so I am given to understand."

"No, sir; his name was Macklin, and he is dead. He died before the fight began. Who told you?"

"A little Mexican girl; seemed to think a lot of the fellow. Meeting up with her is what brought us in here."

"Pancha—yes; where is she?"

The major removed his hat soberly.

"I am sorry to say she got hurt—yonder by the waterfall."

"Hurt! not killed?"

"Yes, killed instantly."

Shelby drew a long breath, and his eyes and those of his wife's met.

"She is happier that way, Tom," she said understandingly. "Now she will never know. I dreaded so to tell her."

Hays caught the words, his eyes seeking the speaker's face.

"Who was the man?" he asked shortly, "one of this outfit?"

"Yes; in no way worthy."

"I thought likely; and you, I take it, *madame,* you are Tom Shelby's wife?"

"Yes," she answered quietly, her clasp tightening on her husband's arm. "I am, and also Colonel Carlyn's daughter. We both belong to the Sixth."

"Carlyn's daughter! Great Scott! do you actually mean that? Do you know they have been hunting you from one end of the border to the other? There was a lawyer in my quarters a week ago questioning me about what had become of Sergeant Calkins. Lord, I didn't know."

"It is true then that I am wanted?" she asked.

"They've been trying to strike your trail for years, the lawyer told me. Some money down East which was left to your mother; let's see, she was a—a—"

"Churchill."

"That's it. The first thing you better do, young woman, is to take a trip to old Virginia."

She smiled, a wistful look in the depths of her eyes, as they sought the face of her husband.

"It is just as Tom says," she answered quietly; "I am very content now."

The firing had ceased, and soldiers crowded the trail below; the play was ended.

(The end.)

His Hour of Love

by Harriette Wilbur

"WOMEN first!" shouted a big officer, blocking the way to his life-boat.

And he raised a revolver threateningly to emphasize his command, as a heavy brute pushed a slender woman roughly aside and crowded for her place. The man shrank back, but only a step.

Roger Markel, leaning on the rail a few feet away, studied the man in the bright glare of the electric lights.

"A mere laborer, who can never hope to do anything but slave for existence, if he gets away!" he sneered. "Yet he fights for a bare chance, while I, who have never failed to get whatever I wanted, stand idly aside and won't make the feeblest kick at fate. I suppose the poor always have their eyes dazzled by the hope of something better ahead, their unattained dreams make them value life, while we rich get surfeited early and so lose interest in the future."

"Women first!" again threatened the officer, as the man took a furtive step forward. "What business you got on this deck, anyway? Steerage go last, and you know it. Get down where you belong and wait your turn."

Markel watched the fellow slink away. He went but a few steps, however, and

stopped in a dark nook near a second life-boat, waiting another opportunity to slip past the officers. Markel coveted the man's magnificent size and strength, much as he scorned his cowardice.

"He'll win out, too, even if he has to swim around until picked up. Nature is on his side. With such glorious strength, and such avid desire to live, he ought to get through all right. I wonder, after all, if life isn't sweeter to him than to me? He probably gets real physical enjoyment out of eating, and sleeping, and drinking, and bragging, and strutting the earth on his two feet. A few generations of plenty—a few years, even—seem to make such stall-fed oxen of us, we stroll to the shambles with dignified unconcern, too surfeited with the good things of life to have any emotions left, even the natural fear of death."

For half an hour Markel had been standing by, idly musing to himself, watching the loading of the life-boats without making the slightest attempt to enter one.

There was no inspiration of high courage or sacrifice in his inactivity. It was simply his habit to stand aside, to avoid crowds except as a cynical onlooker. "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" was his creed, his only rule for interpreting human nature, human conduct, human life in general. Even now, in this time of danger, with death hovering very near, he was amusing himself measuring his fellow-passengers to scale.

When the engines had stopped working, more than an hour before, Markel, in his cabin, had paid no attention to the matter and had gone on reading. As a passenger, and a first-class passenger at that, he felt no responsibility for the navigation of the ship.

Later, upon the steward's warning, he had dressed leisurely and fastidiously as usual, and had come up on deck to find the life-boats already filling with women and children. Since then, he had stood aside, leaning on the rail and watching the scene about him. At first, he was utterly skeptical that the big liner, the last word in ship-building, could really be sinking. But looking down from time to time, he had come to realize that the dark, smooth floor of water below was gradually coming nearer the level of the deck where he stood.

Yet, in the face of danger, Markel maintained that placid indifference, both outward and inward, which was characteristic of him. Others had termed it selfishness, snobbery, cruelty; his wife, more charitable and loving-hearted, had called it ignorance, false ideals, wrong conclusions; Markel thought his apathy a mark of natural superiority. He was persuaded that in his character were compounded the dignity of an aristocrat, the calmness of a stoic, and the ennui of an Alexander. And so it was that at this time, though Markel did not feel particularly brave, his habitual pose enabled him to appear brave.

All about him, however, he saw men exhibiting a calmness equal to his own, but in which he recognized the elements of true bravery. From their words, their manner, Markel knew that many now understood the seriousness of being on an injured liner poorly equipped with life-saving devices. Yet again and again, men glibly lied to their wives, cheerfully put them into life-boats, saw they were comfortably wrapped and seated, smiled encouragingly and spoke reassuringly, then stepped back to make room for the constant stream of women and children coming up from the decks below.

"Now don't worry, Amy love," Markel overheard one young husband soothing his frightened girl-wife. "They'll just take you out in the boat and come back in an hour or two, when the scare is over. Obey orders, and don't make a fuss. It will excite other people, and there is no call for excitement at all. You'll soon be back, laughing about your midnight joy-ride. There isn't the slightest danger to me—you know the ship's practically unsinkable. But we've got to obey the officers, just as though we were soldiers, you know. Now good-by, and keep your head cool and your body warm."

"You believe we're safe?" asked Markel impulsively, as the man came over beside him. He pointed down at the water not forty feet below.

"I know we're sinking, and sinking fast." The young fellow's voice broke on the last word, then he controlled himself. "But I

couldn't tell Amy—she wouldn't have gone—"

Again his voice caught, and he leaned over the rail, waving his hand toward a life-boat that was being rapidly lowered.

"Good-by, dear, good-by, and God take care of you," he began whispering over and over, in a sort of unconscious prayer.

His face worked in spite of his efforts at self-control, and his voice was breaking.

Markel hastily turned away. He had a fastidious dislike for emotion in any form, suppressed or hysterical. He would no more gaze upon a soul in dishabille than he would invade another's private apartments. A display of sentiment always aroused his antipathy, and even now he felt annoyed that another's emotion should be obtruded upon him.

"Bah! He can mourn now. But if this voyage had ended safe and uneventful, ten to one he would have figured in some divorce court before many years. Life is full of big delusions, but love is the worst fraud of all. Lovers vow and sigh, they marry, wear each other's nerves to frazzles, and end by destroying love on the sacrificial altar of their own fiery tempers.

"Love!

"It's a frail affair—a bit of gauzy illusion, satisfactory enough for veiling lover's faults from each other, and for binding their willing hearts together—but entirely inadequate when hoisted for a sail on the matrimonial barque. It's a silken cord fit to set wedding bells jingling merrily, but no suitable hawser for two consorts beating out together into the matrimonial sea. It's an alabaster vase for the flowers of romance, but as a crock for the breakfast baked beans it's—"

He stopped suddenly, chided into silence by Love's refutation of these charges. For just then an elderly couple, whom Markel had seen frequently during the short passage, approached him, moving toward a life-boat. They were beautiful, white-haired old people, with gentle faces so similar in expression as to have the appearance of a double mirror reflecting the same image. Markel had laughed at their devotion, though he had been inclined to admit that in their case blind idolatry had some recompense.

"I cannot go, just now, Janie," the husband was explaining carefully. "I must wait my turn with the other men. You go, like a good girl, and it will be all right, soon."

"No, no!" she insisted, as though her sensitive mind read her husband's secret thoughts. "I won't leave you. We've been together all these years. We stay together now. I shall not leave you, Edward."

"But Janie dear, you must go—and at once." Her husband slippel an arm about her to urge her forward.

"I'll not leave you!" With a quick gesture she flung both arms about his neck and pressed close against his breast. "Let a younger woman take my place. I stay with you."

Her husband could not tear her arms away; she only clung the more desperately and sobbed aloud with the fear of parting. So he soon ceased to urge her. He half carried her to a quiet place at the rail near Markel. And there, with arms about each other, they stood waiting for death, not sadly, but with an expression of calm joy, as though those many years together had prepared them for this hour.

"Love's fabric may be frail at first, but it has a miraculous way of strengthening itself for anything life may demand of it," Markel amended his discourse, apologetically.

And suddenly he caught himself dashing tears from his eyes. His breast heaved, his throat ached, and he was fairly sobbing aloud. A strange glow was warming his cold heart, a strange thrill was beginning to run through his lifeless soul, as new emotions began struggling for the mastery.

Then pity triumphed. Not pity for the two aged lovers meeting death together—he envied them their many rich years of companionship. The pity was for himself, that he had so tragically missed the one thing in life worth while, love. Not self-love—love for others. Oh, the mockery of it, that now, when his hold on life was most insecure, he should have a glimpse of the endless opportunities for happiness it had held for him! All these years he had been walking in selfishness as a man enveloped in a thick fog; he had gone on and on, see-

ing only himself. Now that death, like the setting sun, dispelled the mists that had blinded him, he discerned all about him human souls whose companionship he might have enjoyed during the long day so soon to come to a close.

And among them came Gertrude, the woman who had been his wife—no, who still was his wife, though he had deliberately let her drift from him. He had sneered because love had been too frail a thread to hold them together, when a warm, sympathetic handclasp between them would have relieved the strain and they could have continued through life together weathering whatever tempests assailed them.

He saw now, with deep humiliation, with sincere contrition, that he alone was to blame for their bitter separation. His apathy had chilled and pained her warm, loving heart, until she could endure no more. He recalled with shame the many times Gertrude had come to him eager and happy, and a cold word or an unresponsive look had made her shrink back, her little story forgotten, her joy quite gone, her flushed face blanched as a death mask, her glowing eyes tear-filled, her whole expression changed in an instant from happiness to despair.

For no other reason than to gratify his obstinate egotism, his pride in a pose of unemotional hauteur, he had deliberately humiliated and insulted her beyond forgiveness, and murdered the love she had tried to guard and cherish.

And he could so easily have made her happy, had he merely chosen to alter his manner. He had derided her softness and gentleness, her quick response to the joys and sorrows of others, her quick sympathy, her interest in and consideration for her fellow-creatures.

"Your heart—or perhaps it is only your nerves—is a lute upon which any self-pitying driveler or light-fingered mendicant can strum at will." He remembered this comment, also how it had checked her pathetic little story.

He himself had not refrained from plucking at those same sensitive lutestrings. It seemed to him now he was always jangling them, for he could recall so many vivid scenes of leaving her in nervous trembling and tears, spending the time at his club or elsewhere while she should "recover her balance," a favorite expression of his. He had loathed the sight of her feverish, throbbing lips, her red, tear-scorched eyes, her hot, trembling hands. Yet he had not refrained from arousing what he termed her "emotional sprees."

When she had at last gone her way alone, he had refused to miss her, refused to blame himself in any way, and had kept his unswerving path without a confession of remorse even in his inmost thoughts, cynically charging it to the fickleness of the love that vows to endure till death shall part.

But now he saw both in a new light, and this time it was himself he viewed with loathing.

"In my cold, self-centered, pig-headed conceit, I tried to make her over into an image of myself, when I should have devoted myself to the task of becoming more like her." Frankly his strange humility now worded itself in his mind, dwelling upon the memory of Gertrude, paying deference to the sweetness and womanliness of her gentle, loving heart.

And a longing to see her, an ache of regret, a desire to atone, strained at his heart. And it was too late!

But no, he would not stand quietly aside and die like a rat in Fate's trap! He would make an effort to save himself, and if he succeeded—

He started toward a life-boat that was being filled, and there was but one thought in his mind—to go to Gertrude.

"Women first!" an inexorable officer reminded, as he dashed forward. "Just a moment, sir. Any more women on this deck?"

Markel glanced about anxiously, a great fear tugging at his heart. He was relieved to see no one but men about, and eagerly, hopefully, thankfully, set his foot inside the boat. And then, like a taunt from grim Nemesis, came a cry:

"Wait, sir! Here's a woman!"

A thinly clad form rushed past him, and stood there contesting his place. He saw her wild face in the strong light, it was a heavy-featured, strong-handed, bovine-

bodied peasant girl, wearing a cotton kerchief over her hair and a cheap coarse coat that clung loosely to her broad shoulders. For an instant Markel suffered such a passion of hate for the creature robbing him of his chance that he could have struck her. But she clung to life, too, with an agony and a challenge in her stern eyes which made him yield silently to her demand. Without a word, without a sign, she took his place. Markel turned away with a shrug of his shoulders, smiling grimly at the treachery fortune had played in deciding against him, her one-time favorite, and for an illiterate, sabot-shod peasant girl!

"Another boat will be going, sir," the officer reminded him, respectfully. "But first-class passengers take precedence over steerage, you know!"

But other women from the steerage now crowded forward, many more than one boat could accommodate, and he realized there was no opportunity for him. But he couldn't go without one sign, a farewell—

He saw his steward standing near the loaded life-boat, and approached him.

"Shall you be going?"

"I'm detailed to go with this boat, sir," answered the man.

"Would you undertake to deliver a message for me—to my—my wife—in case you get through? The address is—but no—" Markel drew out a memorandum-book and wrote the message, a few words of remorse, of hope for forgiveness, from the depths of his heart, and with an emotion he had never dreamed he could feel.

Then Markel handed the book to the man, and with it several gold-pieces.

"You'll not forget?"

"I'll not, sir, and I'll surely do it, sir. But don't you give up yet. There's still other boats to go, there's the life-rafts, and a rescue-ship is already on her way."

"Thanks, but I want to be sure Gertrude gets that message, and I'm trusting you to deliver it. And—" Markel emptied his pockets into the man's hands. I have no more use for this. Take it; if you get through all right you'll be able to use it. If I get through, too, I can easily get more. And here, give this gold-piece to that poor girl who sits there." And he indicated the stolid peasant who had crowded him aside. Then he shook hands with the steward. "Good-by, and if I do get through, we'll meet again, my man."

Markel turned hastily away to make room for the women and children crowding forward.

The simple act of sending a message to Gertrude, the humility and regret it expressed, raised him to a spiritual plane where everything was new and wonderful. It was like the climber who suddenly finds himself on top of the mountain and the vast view stretching about him.

He looked upon the human beings about him with new eyes. He no longer scoffed and criticised, but understood and pitied. As he watched the poor, work-worn, heavy-faced women who had so few compensations for the struggle a mere existence cost them, Markel's irony vanished. His eyes filled with sympathetic tears. After all, such mothers did their duty by the race; with their whole strength they served the children they brought into the world; they willingly suffered that their children might have opportunities for freedom and enlightenment. As pioneers they had conquered many a wilderness, and more than one good and great American traces his origin to some such a mother. Markel recalled, for the first time without a feeling of shamed apology, that his own family owed its prosperity to ancestors who had traveled steerage to the New World.

The last atom of Markel's snobbishness disappeared like ice in a flame. His heart, kindled by the divine torch of fraternal sympathy, glowed in his breast like a burning coal and warmed him through and through. His cold blood began to thaw and to course wildly through his veins, until his very finger-tips tingled with a desire to serve. After squandering forty years in vanity and self-love, the time was so wofully short for him to indulge in the new-found joy of loving mankind.

He sprang forward, spurred with the enthusiasm of helping some one—any one.

The officers were having trouble with the steerage passengers, who were now streaming up from below. Some of the men were

determined to break through, and struggled with the women for places near the life-boats. Markel's eyes fell on an old, white-haired woman who stood off on the edge of the mob, dazed and helpless, pushed here and there by the younger and stronger ones who surged about her.

"Women first!" shouted Markel.

He still held in his hand the cane he had absent-mindedly carried up on deck; and with its heavy gold knob he beat back two men who were struggling in front of the old women.

"Women first!" he shouted, at every blow.

They dodged away, cursing savagely, but Markel, for all he was slight and none too robust, soon forced them to draw off. Then he hurried the trembling old woman forward and delivered her into the care of an officer just as the life-boat was swinging down.

As Markel turned to help others forward, he glimpsed a thin, rat-faced man skulking along the edge of the group near the life-boat farther on. Suddenly, the wretch caught at the large, heavy shawl a woman wore over her shoulders, and slipped away with it. Markel followed him with his eyes, and sprang after him. He got the shawl, but the man was slender and wiry, and soon wormed his way out of sight.

"For a disguise!" Markel sneered scornfully. "As though his hide was worth saving!"

He looked back at the woman. She wore the thinnest of calico waists over her bony shoulders, but if she missed the shawl she was indifferent to its loss. She had her arms about two small, partially-dressed children, and bent all her energies to getting them forward.

Markel edged his way to her, picked up the larger child, and beckoned her to follow. Reaching the boat, he set the child on its feet and wrapped the shawl about it deftly, with a sudden tenderness for the helplessness of childhood. Then he took off his fur-lined overcoat and motioned the woman to put it on. Without a word, she slipped her arms into the sleeves, and dumbly awaited his further orders.

Markel handed her a roll of bills. "You may as well have these, too, particularly if you get through, as I believe you will."

He had a strange, exalted feeling that every one he helped to-night was going to live in his stead, and when he lifted up the younger child to hand her to her mother, he suddenly crushed her in his arms.

"Grant she may live, to carry on the torch of life!" was his thought.

He put her gently down, and drew the coat about her, so she was warm in her mother's arms. Then he turned to leave them. But a detaining hand caught his coat, and when he looked down he saw the woman's stolid face working painfully, and tears rolling down her white cheeks.

"God bless you!" she muttered huskily, in broken English.

"I thank you," and Markel smiled reassuringly upon her. "He has, already."

He helped other women and children into the boat, and from the confusion all about he realized the end was drawing near. He worked feverishly, trying to get as many in as possible. He had forgotten himself in his zeal for saving others; the danger, though imminent, now seemed strangely impersonal. He knew all who remained on the ship would have the barest chance of escape, yet he had the feeling he was going to live on and on.

He felt like one in a bad dream, who works madly to accomplish something, but keeps assuring himself that everything is going to end all right—must end all right.

An officer touched him on the arm.

"You've been a big help, sir. And this is the last boat. Better get in before we lower. We can't take on but two or three more."

Markel glanced about him. Women still crowded forward, while in the background were scores of men as anxious as he to be saved. He glanced over the crowd of white, drawn faces, and shook his head.

"I'll take my chances with the men," he answered, and pushed into his place a slender, half-dressed woman carrying a small child in her arms. Markel snatched off his coat and wrapped it about her shoulders.

There was nothing more for him to do, and he pushed his way through the crowd,

seeking a quiet place at the rail. He passed a group of kneeling passengers, cabin and steerage, gathered about a tall, pale, black-robed priest who seemed the incarnation of Faith as he steadily led the recitation of the rosary. He passed a long line of men who stood leaning on the rail, quietly awaiting the next move in the tragedy Fate was weaving about them. Markel recognized among them men of indomitable will, who in the business world had swept all obstacles aside, yet who now were helpless as children. He passed the white-haired old couple whose years of love and service had played such an important part in this last hour of his life. He had an impulse to thank them for the exaltation filling his heart. But they were still standing with arms locked about each other, oblivious to everything but themselves, whispering together of the many joys and raptures they had lived together.

So Markel drew away by himself, and looked down into the dark water, now but a few feet away.

He shivered with the menace it held, and looked away. But still he was conscious of danger and death. The air rang with it. Far over the water came the dip of oars as the life-boats rowed away. Nearer were the splashing falls of those who were forsaking the doomed ship for the almost equally treacherous water. Here and there among the quiet passengers was a man who prayed or wept aloud. But above all else wailed the hopeless cries of those whom the icy water was torturing and killing.

Markel tried to shut it all out from his mind, and fixed his eyes on the bright, calm stars shining steadily on so far above the scene of pain, sorrow and death. He started to pray, but even while his unaccustomed lips formed soundless, meaningless words, he beheld Gertrude. She stood before him, her brown eyes troubled and tear-filled, her lips trembling, her hands clutching nervously at her throat.

"But Roger—you should sometimes—think of—others," she was faltering. "Remember, greater love hath no man than this, that he give his life for—others, in his daily living, if not in his death."

And then her expression changed to one radiant with love and happiness, and Markel thought it must be that the spirit of his message had reached her across time and space.

"Gertrude, my dear, my dear!" he whispered, his voice breaking in a thrill of ecstacy as he sensed her nearness and dearness.

Her soft hand touched his, her brown eyes glowed with tender forgiveness, a curl of her hair brushed his cheek, her arms crept about his neck, and her mouth was raised to his welcoming, inviting, his kisses.

"Thank God, you are here, sir!" a voice close behind interrupted the rapturous vision.

Markel turned slowly, an exclamation of impatience rising to his lips. There stood his valet, his expression that of one eager to speak, yet hesitating to do so.

"Well, Crowley," Markel spoke kindly. It was no time for impatience. "We are no longer master and man, are we, but merely man and man. And each for himself. Didn't you have a chance to go?"

"No. There was never a chance for me, the women going first, sir. I've been looking everywhere for you. I — there was something I thought you might like to know —being it's so like the end, sir, and there's so little chance. It's this, sir. Mrs. Markel—"

He paused, as though abashed at his temerity, and waiting permission to speak further.

"Go on, Crowley. I—I have already sent a message to Mrs. Mar—to my wife. What of her?"

Crowley, with a sigh of relief, handed an open letter to Markel. Markel seized it eagerly, and read Gertrude's plea for some word of her husband.

"Does he ever speak of me, Crowley? Does he ever seem to miss me? Oh, I would come back so gladly, if he would make the least sign he wants me. And if he ever does seem to be—changing—toward me—you will be sure to let me know, Crowley?"

He looked at the date.

"Three months ago! You've had this letter all that time, Crowley, and never showed it to me?"

"I—I was waiting for some sign, sir. And—I never seemed to quite see the time when—"

"True, Crowley. You are quite blameless. And I thank you for giving it to me, now."

Markel felt the tears rush into his eyes and voice, and he looked away. So she had already forgiven him, and his vision of a few moments before might long ago have been a reality! The love he had thought so dead was only drugged into unconsciousness by the fumes of his own egotism and intolerance. He could have been happy all this time, instead of pretending to himself he was quite satisfied.

In that bitter instant, it seemed to him all the stings and slights with which he had wounded and humiliated others, particularly Gertrude's loving heart, now pierced and buffeted his own heart. But he would atone! He must live! He must find Gertrude!

"I must see her!" he cried, and turned to Crowley. "I can't go this way, without making my peace with Gertrude. Is there nothing we can do to save ourselves?"

"Our only chance is leaping overboard, and then drifting about until a life-boat takes us on, or a steamer comes. Shall we try that? The ship is sinking fast, and our chances are less if we go down with her."

"Yes, yes," cried Markel, tugging frantically the laces of his shoes. "Even without life-belts, we'll try it."

The two men clasped hands for a silent moment, then they mounted the rail and leaped together. Markel heard the whistle of air in his ears, then the icy water closed over him.

When he came up, gasping and shuddering, he called to Crowley, but got no answer. He swam aimlessly about for a time, his body aching with the cold. All at once, like a living creature writhing in its death struggle, the ship seemed to rise up in the air, totter an instant, and fall back out of sight. After that, there seemed less hope, the water grew more icy, the night blacker. Still, Markel swam on, fighting despair.

At last he saw a black bulk near at hand. It was a heavy piece of furniture, and another man had succeeded in boarding it. Markel's muscles were throbbing with pain, it was as though the black, icy water were a giant hand gripping him with crushing strength. He tried to seize upon the polished wood, and draw his numb body up, but his arms were paralyzed and he could not lift himself, try as he would.

"Hold on!" cried a gruff voice above him, and a strong hand clutched his arm.

The man tried to draw Markel up, but could only get him partially out of the water. He leaned far over, and his breath wheezed and moaned in Markel's ear. But Markel could not help himself, and the man's struggles were unavailing. Then he saw the man's face, and Markel recognized in his rescuer the strong laborer whose attempts to board a life-boat an hour before had so aroused his scorn.

"Can't you help yourself a bit?" panted the man, between heavy breaths.

Markel tried, but his weight seemed leaden, and his relaxed hands were powerless to lift it.

"Then hold on if you can, and I'll get down and see if I can't hoist you up."

And the man slid down into the water beside Markel.

"No use!" gasped Markel. "I'm dying. This icy water— Listen! Tear off my shirt. There's a belt of money— I'd forgotten. You can use it—you'll live."

"Hold on! Hold on!" shrieked the man, grasping Rogers' shoulders in his strong clutch. "A boat 'll be coming soon. Hold on!"

But Roger could not keep his dead fingers on the wood. It went far from him. He was sinking lower and lower, the water covered his face. Suddenly the terrible ache and pain left him, and he became strangely soothed and warmed.

A great peace came into his soul.

Next, he was conscious of a voice, a presence, a bright face, greeting him, welcoming him, smiling upon him.

"Gertrude!" And with the cry he seemed to rise from the cold dark water into a realm of radiance and joy. "Gertrude! Oh, my dear—the best—of all—is—love. And—greater love—hath no man—than—this—that he—give—his life—for—oth-ers!"

A He-Man's Country

by Warren H. Miller

"YEA-AH! It's a man's country, pal!" gloated Thornton, stretching his long arms luxuriously, and glancing out the log cabin window at the mighty ranges of the Olympics that surrounded them.

"Too much!" demurred Hilda, setting her little mouth determinedly.

"Well, I'll admit it ain't no skirt emporium!" grinned Thornton, largely. "But look! A year ago you was a steno in Seattle—"

"Some steno!" laughed Hilda, reminiscently, in low, musical gurgles. She had flirted outrageously with her boss—and she loved clothes, and pretty things in the shop-windows, and candy, and the movies—

"And now look at you—and us!" went on Thornton enthusiastically, waving his hand around the walls of the cabin. His eyes rested fondly on the trim little figure of his wife, bewitchingly set off by its buck-skin skirt and its olive flannel waist, open at the throat and garnished with a saucy, red silk bandanna. A flowing sombrero set on her brown curls, framing the dainty, tanned face, out of which beamed dancing eyes of fathomless blue.

"Some looker!" glowed Thornton, admiringly. "And, a year ago, *I* was clerking in a fur house—a hell of a thing for a he-man to do—and both of us were working our heads off and not getting ahead one penny. Now—we own the earth!"

They did, indeed! The log cabin that they had bought from old man Wrangell for a mere grub-stake, freed them of rent; and the half-ton of provisions that had been packed in from the coast, costing but a hundred dollars of their combined savings, would take them care-free of food through the winter.

True, the log cabin lay sixty miles from civilization, in the mountains, but every inch of its stout interior spelled solid comfort. Thornton's eye roved about it contentedly. A hewn table of cedar logs pinned together with trenails, with planed and polished top; benches and chairs, house-worn and shiny, but built of ax-fitted roots and oddly curved branches; a huge stone fireplace, with kettle and crane and a Dutch oven standing on the hearth; big fur rugs in profusion on the floors; game heads, snowshoes, skis, traps, and rifles on the walls—these were the home goods that represented Thornton's skill as a woodsman. For he had been born and raised a trapper, and back to that wild, free life he had pursuaded Hilda to go with him, after a few years of discontent in the cities.

"You bet—it's a man's country, all right—I love it!" yawned Thornton happily, returning again to his major theme.

"Too much so, Walter!" retorted Hilda, as firmly as before. "After we have made our pile—this very season—we'll have to get out."

"Why, honey?" inquired he, astonished. "Whoever 'd want to leave these grand old mountains, girl? Don't you love them yourself, pal?"

"I'll tell you why." She tiptoed over to him, slipped an arm around his neck, and whispered something in his ear.

"Yea-ah!" cried Walter, delightedly. "Something else besides the brush fence running around the log cabin soon, eh? We-ell—now. That's different, en-tirely! In that case I was figuring on opening a trading-post with the Kwakiutl Injuns, down t' the coast, once we sell our furs."

"We'll have to, Walter. This is no place for a baby—he'd worry me to death, for fear he'd wander off and get lost, or hurt himself somehow in this awful country. I couldn't stand it. And then—if—if we *might* run down to Seattle once in a while, just for a peek," she added wistfully.

"Yes, and have you make eyes at that Lawrie fellow, and all the rest of the boys—I guess not!" cut in Walter, jealously.

"Oh, I just teased 'em—don't get jealous now! I loved to flirt—men get so excited and serious over it!" laughed Hilda. "Sometimes Lawrie used to look at me as if he wanted to eat me!" she pealed. "But he was a skinny old thing—half alive," she pouted disdainfully. "There's only one man for me, Walter—and he's six feet high, and all man, and as strong as a bear—and I adore—" she ended in the smother of his rough embraces.

"There, honey. It's time I hit the trail for the trap-lines," said Walter at length, releasing her. "Put me up a ration in case I have to den up out in the mountains tonight."

Hilda detained him. "There's another thing, deary," she faltered with troubled voice. "I haven't spoken of it before, because it's our bread and butter, but—"

She went out into the lean-to, and returned with a dead mink, which Walter had not had time to skin. She stroked its glossy fur, and then her hand rested accusingly on the small, bloody stump of a foot, gnawed off by the hapless animal in the trap.

"I hadn't meant that you should see that!" exclaimed Walter hastily. "There are things about this business that no woman should know."

"How did he loose that foot?" demanded Hilda, looking up at him with tragic eyes.

"Well—er—you see—" began Walter confusedly, "it was some time before I could get to him, you see, and—and—the little cuss must have got desperate—and—sort of ate it off—"

"Oh, the brave little beasty!" exclaimed Hilda, pityingly. "Would *you* have had the grit to do that—if *your* foot should be caught? Oh, Walter—it might be, you know—in one of your bear or lion traps. Tell me," she broke off, picking up a great mink tippet and her fur muff, luxuriant in profusion of prime skins that Walter had tanned for her, "were any of these ever in such a plight? For—I'd never wear it again, if I knew."

"No," said Walter steadily, "it don't happen often. You can see that all their claws are on them."

"Just the same, it's cruel! I hate to feel that our living is on the sufferings of *anything!*"

"But some one has to catch them!" cried Walter. "Sometimes, though, I get disgusted with it myself. We'll quit when this season is over. I'd hate to think of *him*—you know—playing happily about, his very bread earned for him by the misery of a string of wretched little creeters, jumping about in agony—"

"Don't, Walter! We must not think of it!" choked Hilda, pitifully. "Come—I'll run and get your lunch!"

All the world lay in white mists, with the snow hanging heavily on the spruces, as Walter slipped on his mackinaw, strapped his belt-ax through its cloth belt, grabbed up his heavy .35 rifle, and called Dime and Kim, his two dogs, for the trip along the fur line. The snow whirled down in endless flying flakes, and the forests about him were a silent cathedral of white beauty as he set forth.

Mile after mile he plodded on, stopping now and then at a blazed tree, to go down into a little glade and look at the trap concealed there. Sometimes a glance at a cautious distance, told him that no visitor had come around; more often the snow

would be trampled and bloody, and a wildly frightened, struggling mink or marten would leap to the end of the chain and bare desperate teeth at him, like a cornered rat, or a fox or lynx would make his last stand against the onset of the dogs. Then, a blow from a stout club would end the animal's miseries, and the quick skinning knife would transfer the beautiful, shining coat to the knapsack on Walter's back.

The two dogs had a great partnership in this business. Their office was to track and hunt the larger fur game—mountain lion, bobcat, and black and brown bear. Sometimes the chase would sound for miles, the clear bell of Dime's voice and the savage bark of Kim echoing down through the valleys, until finally the game, turned by the sagacious dogs, would come past Walter within rifle-shot, when the swift bullet would end it.

Diamond was a big Southern coonhound, a typical rat-tailed, raw-boned pot-licker smell-dog. Kim was a thoroughbred Airedale, of the big Western hunting stocks, a true Culbertson, a terrible fighter, with slashing wolf-fangs that dealt death where they touched. Always on his toes with eagerness, his speed and courage were a welcome supplement to methodical and relentless Diamond. When the two got on the trail of elk, brown bear or cougar it meant much meat on the jerky frame, and many fur robes in the cabin.

By noon Walter had reached the end of the trap line, some five miles from home, and then he pushed on into new country, up valleys that were forty miles long, with a clear, nameless river that nobody owned, flowing down through the firs and balsams. It was an immense country, with immense, snowy mountains lying by night under the glory of the stars—and his nearest neighbor was forty miles away! The hillsides were clad with tall redwoods, so big that a horse, from nose to tail, would scarce equal the diameter of their trunks. The flats in the valleys were covered with the great columnar spires, and under here was silence and peace, and it always seemed to be Christmas.

Walter plodded silently on, with his dogs snuffing at his heels. They stopped to examine the myriads of tracks left in the snow by the forest dwellers, and, here and there, they blazed a tree to mark locations for the new trap-line, for, with the new change in his prospects, he would now need all the furs he could catch.

Then he stopped to examine, with more than usual interest, something the like of which he had seen but a few times in his life before, an Indian bear-trap, a great log deadfall, built by the Kwakiutl Indians probably a dozen years before. It had never been sprung, and all its mechanism seemed rotten and ready to release the log at the slightest touch.

Two heavy cedar logs had been staked side by side on the ground, while between them a third log rose at a long slant, held up by a twisted rope of cedar-bark. The rope led over a stout post frame, and a heavy stake sear was attached to it, with its lower end pointed and notched into a long trigger-pole that went the full length under the log deadfall. A bear, putting his foot on that trigger-pole anywhere would spring the trap by pushing down the pole out of its notch in the club, thus releasing the rope which held up the deadfall log.

Walter stood viewing this ingenious construction of the Indians with every expression of pleasure at the cunning artificery of it. Meanwhile the two dogs came snuffing back along the trail, and Diamond, his long ears white-tipped with snow, went around the trap to inspect. Then he innocently started to walk right through it!

"Get out of that, you old fool potlicker!" yelled Walter, shying a handful of snow at the dog. Diamond hesitated, drew back, and then, with the diabolical persistency of the hound, put a big paw on the pole and made to come through again.

Walter dashed forward and aimed an exasperated kick at the dog's nose—but he was just a fraction of a second too late! There was a swish and a thump of the released club, and, with a mighty crash the big deadfall log fell to the snow—smashed back to earth after nameless years of waiting!

With the speed of light, Diamond had withdrawn his head from under the falling log, but the slower-witted man had no such

instantaneous quickness, for the deadfall caught and crushed his foot between it and the side log!

Walter yelled with agony; the pain was so intense that he could think of nothing. He gasped, fought and tore at the trap—anything to relieve that intolerable pain shooting up his leg. As well try to get out of a vise—his foot was jammed fast, if indeed his leg was not broken in two!

He toppled over backward, pitching his rifle wildly to one side and clawing desperately at the undergrowth as he fell. And then he felt his senses leaving him—the pain was too great for human nature to stand; a heavy, drowsy feeling came over him, and, with a few contented, comfortable little sighs, he closed his eyes and fainted away.

He came to, maybe half an hour later, awakened by the cold and a dull pain in his foot. He opened his eyes, bewildered, then horrified to find his leg swollen beyond recognition, almost to bursting inside his buckskin trousers. Then, with a rush, came upon him mental torture—far greater than any physical pain, as Hilda's situation dawned upon him.

Without him, to face a winter and childbirth alone, with the snows fifteen feet deep —*unthinkable!* It meant death to her—and to *him*, that little son who would soon be creeping around the log cabin. The thought was unbearable—he *must* escape! He surveyed his situation, terrified.

The insistent pangs shooting through the dammed-up blood-vessels throughout his leg would not let him think connectedly. In disjointed dabs of conjecture, he would wonder how he could possibly manage to escape, or ponder on whatever would become of Hilda without his protection, or would speculate as to whether Nature was merciful enough to the animals to let them faint with the pain of the trap, or whether it had to be one long agony of endurance with them.

His own punishment kept bringing him back to this idea again and again. Life for him was now one raw, physical torment. All the world seemed made up of irksome pain, as if the sufferings of all the animals he had ever trapped were concentrated in the torture of that one leg.

Another disconnected flash of thought floated through his mind, jostling other feverish fancies—all this suffering, that was slowly unnerving him, was but that of *one* animal, and probably not as bad as theirs, for he had not their stamina to withstand pain. All the throes he was enduring were as nothing compared to those of that Spartan little mink who had felt them all and then *added* to them by gnawing off his own foot—for life and freedom!

"Ugh!" shivered Walter at the thought. "I'm through! Hilda was right—I'll never trap another so long as I live!" He turned to Kim, who still stood beside him. "Forgive me, Kim!" he pleaded as if the dog personified the whole of brute creation. "No more of this trap business, Kim dog—the rifle's good enough for us!"

Kim came over and snuffed solicitously about him; Diamond had gone off on a trail somewhere, his hunting instincts being too strong to keep him long beside his master's body. There was little pain in his foot, for it was numb, but the agony in his leg was fast becoming intolerable. It, and the cold, would soon finish him! A sense of despair overpowered him; there was no escape from a deadfall, though men *had* got out of steel traps before!

He eyed his leg speculatively, where it disappeared into the crack between the two logs, and then fumbled under his mackinaw and drew out the keen little belt-ax.

"Courage, man! Courage! Have at least the grit of that mink!" he steeled himself for the ordeal. But his whole physical being shrank from the idea. To hack it off—to make himself a cripple for life—to say good-by to the loved outdoor life and doom himself to clerkdom again—how precious was that freedom which he had always thoughtlessly taken for granted, as a natural right! But now—

"It must be—even if I bleed to death—I'll get back to Hilda somehow."

But his hand faltered at the blow. Even tying a preparatory tourniquet around his leg could not steel him to the irrevocable step. Despairingly, he cudgeled his wits for some other solution.

Then a sharp chill struck through him, and spurred his mind to further activity. His memory went backward to a time when he had visited the Kwakiutl Indians up along the coast. He could see them working at just such cedar logs as these, splitting them into boards with their primitive tools—stone axes and wedges—cutting them in half with fire.

He saw two squaws tending just such a fire, a small one of live coals, built where they wished to cut a log in two. He remembered watching them, how they kept pouring a thin band of water around the log on each side of the fire, a constant drip from a bark bucket keeping the fire from spreading along the log, except just where the cut was to be made.

Then he eyed the trap calculatingly, and a hope of escape flashed into his mind. Fire! Fire! Man's most ancient friend—that was the solution!

"First, something to prevent the deadfall log from coming down any further," he decided. "Next, to cut the side log behind my foot with fire; then, to shoot away that stake, which holds its further end, with the rifle—and I'm *free!*"

He twisted about and got hold of the big stake that had held the deadfall up, and, with a few sharp cuts of the ax, hacked away its cedar rope. Then he jammed the club crosswise in under the deadfall, on top of the two side logs, and so the deadfall was prevented from coming down any further.

Next, he twisted his body along the side log, back of his imprisoned foot, and began chipping away at the log. The first inch or so was easy, as the flaky, fibrous bark fell away under the ax, but soon he bit down into sound cedar, and good kindling chips fell out on the snow. Walter cleared away a little hollow, split the chips, and built a pyramid of them, to which he soon put a match.

Presently a cheery blaze was established, while the busy hatchet kept adding more dry chips to it, split out of the top of the side log. Already a gouge was made in its huge bulk, and the warmth of the fire seemed grateful to his chilled bones. The fire grew steadily, until Walter was kept busy molding snowballs and packing them around the log on his side, to prevent it burning too uncomfortably near his foot.

Then he began to turn his attention to his rifle. It lay buried in the snow a good six feet off. "Kim! Come here—fetch!" he commanded, urging the Airedale to go pick up the rifle. Kim was eager, but it was next to impossible to get him to understand. He had fetched nearly everything in his life before, but never a rifle!

"Kim! Fetch!" urged Walter, pointing at the rifle. "Fetch—fetch here!" he encouraged as Kim eagerly pawed about and under it, looking for something *to* fetch, and even taking its barrel in his jaws, but each time dropping it again.

"Good dog! Attaboy! Fetch!" barked Walter, as the dog nuzzled under the barrel, bunting it a few inches nearer. Kim lay down on the weapon and faced Walter happily, his tongue lolling out as he panted contentedly. What did master want, anyway? There wasn't anything *to* fetch under that rifle! Walter swore fiercely.

"Kim! At 'em! Fetch!" he entreated, pointing eagerly at the rifle. Kim played about coquettishly, then darted at the rifle and grabbed its stock in his jaws. "Great business! Fetch here!" urged Walter frantically. Kim dropped it and came over for a petting.

The fire had now got out of hand entirely, and the trap was all ablaze, for the other logs had caught fire, and pelting them with snowballs was futile. Then, far off, away up in the mountains, floated down the mighty horn of Diamond's voice. It echoed down through the valleys, a faint musical note. Kim started off, but Walter called him back sternly. It was imperative to have that rifle.

"I suppose that fool hound-dog has got something—and of course he'll drive it right here—and me helpless!" groaned Walter hopelessly, longing to get his hands on the rifle. "Kim! Fetch! Damn you!" he yelled, exasperatedly.

But Kim would not come nearer; he dreaded fire, and all three logs were now blazing fiercely. Walter's attention was urgently directed on saving his foot, over which he banked up more snow as it melted

away in the flames, and he wriggled out of his mackinaw, for he was running sweat at every pore.

Nearer and nearer came Diamond's bay; they could trace the course of the game, as the bell notes came floating down the valley. Whatever it was, it was heading right for them, driven by the sagacious hound as he circled to right and left of the trail. It became increasingly hard to hold Kim, impossible to get him to do any more work on the rifle.

Then came a crash in the lodgepole pine thickets up on the mountain flank, and Walter turned over, to see a huge Alaska brown bear ambling along, looking back over his shoulder now and then, and coming straight on, his track through the snow a wide trough as if some one had rolled a bale of hay down the mountainside.

Kim got up on his toes, and the battling hair rose on the back of his neck. Walter swore savagely; he was in a fair way to lose *both* dogs without the rifle, for one slash of those five-inch claws would be enough. And then, with the bear fighting-mad—

He must put his wits to work, and that quickly! An idea came whizzing into his brain. He whipped out his hunting-knife and groped in the snow, cutting furiously at the roots of a small switch of underwood. He tore fiercely at it, as Kim circled around the bear, and Diamond appeared, dashing down the trail in full cry, with flashing white fangs bared. The bear rose on his haunches and lunged swift strokes with his paws at the circling dogs, who looked back at Walter, awaiting the crash of the rifle. Wasn't he ever going to fire!

Walter wrenched the sapling clear from the snow and pawed frantically with it at the rifle. Its roots caught in the trigger lever as Kim dashed in and got a hold behind the bear's elbow. Walter could see the huge paw thrashing up and down, with the Airedale hanging grimly on, and he grabbed swiftly for the rifle and aimed for a vital spot.

Then the heavy piece bellowed, and Walter heard the bullet smash bone. With a squeal of rage, the bear charged at him, both dogs hanging tenaciously to hock and elbow. Walter pumped the lever grimly, driving in shot after shot. At each the bear flinched and bit at the wound, striking savagely at the dogs, but plunging on.

Then Walter steadied himself, holding the bead of the rifle between the two glaring eyes, and pulled the trigger. The bear collapsed, turned a complete somersault, kicked, and lay still, while Kim, his eyes mad with battle, ran up on the carcass and barked defiance at the whole world. He honestly thought he had killed that entire bear himself!

"It's a man's country, all right!" laughed Walter, in spite of his pain and exhaustion. "But—it's no place to risk Hilda in!" He grinned widely at the utter savagery of his surroundings—the dead bear lying not ten feet off, the two dogs fighting and snarling over it, the blazing logs that still held him prisoner. "She's right; it's too much—there's three of us now!" he muttered. "Never again! If I ever get out of this!"

Suddenly, with a dull smash of burning cinders, the deadfall log parted in two—and a totally unexpected mechanical development followed. For, swinging like a giant seesaw about the club, the heavy outer end of the log dipped to the snow, and, like a mighty walking-beam, the burnt end rose majestically, lifting itself off Walter's crushed foot! "Go—prisoner!" it seemed to say. "Your gates are unlocked!"

Walter gasped with astonishment at his unlooked-for freedom, and, scarce daring to hope, drew his foot away from the side log and felt the injured member gingerly. No bones broken—thank God! He shuddered to think of what setting a bone, single-handed in the wilderness, would mean.

Then he called off his dogs imperiously, crawling over to the carcass. He caught Dime by his collar and sent the dog home with a note to Hilda tied to it, telling her to bring out the toboggan in the morning, following his tracks in the snow.

Warmth for the night was his next consideration, and he set about the business of skinning out the bear and building a primitive snow hut. By nightfall he and Kim were curled up before a roaring fire that was once a Kwakiutl bear-trap, while bear steaks sizzled before the glowing logs.

Two hours later Walter sat, peaceful and contented, enveloped in the bear rug, puffing serenely at his pipe and watching the moon soaring over the silver-mantled spruces in the way that he loved. It was a good old world, after all, and a he-man's country to boot!

Then his reverie was interrupted by the swift thudding footfall of light steps in the snow—and Hilda was sobbing on his breast.

"Why—Hilda—little pal! Whatever made you come out to-night?" soothed the man tenderly. "You needn't ha' done it, hon—'deed you oughtn't ta."

"Oh—that note—that dreadful note!" sobbed Hilda. "Why the sledge? What terrible thing has happened? Dime came scratching at the door—and he was all covered with blood—and smelt of bear—and that note! I just packed up and *came*—think I could have slept a wink? Oh, Walter, deary!" she cried, hysterically.

"There, now — 'twasn't nothin' — don't worry, honey. I just got caught in a deadfall, and Dime drûv a bear down onto me—but I burned the trap and shot the bear—it's all right now, but my foot hurts a little mite—"

"Your foot!" she screamed, fairly diving at the injured member, sobbing tenderly over it, caressing it as if it were a baby. Gosh, what a fuss women did make over utter trifles!

Walter resigned. Here were two hopelessly irreconcilable elements—man, the eternal savage; women, the eternal civilizer!

"Home, James—in the morning!" he surrendered. "When I can move about again, honey, I promise you we'll hit the trail for the settlements. I'm quittin' this trapping game, pal, forever. That foot's been tellin' me a few things about it, that maybe I didn't 'preciate before. I'm through with it, hon—the rifle, an' big game's my story, from now on—no more pore leetle creeters hurted for us!"

Hilda's eyes glowed at him with a new appreciation. To her he seemed to have thrown off something that had held him down, bemeaned him in her eyes before. She kissed him tenderly.

"Gee! I'm glad to hear that!" she exclaimed, her eyes shining in the monlight. Then she snuggled down into his shoulder, looking up at him with a sort of hero-worship. "Man!" she cooed. "My *man!*"

The Limper

by Lyon Mearson

At midnight a dank, heavy fog hung low over London, like a nebulous, misty pall. Here and there, at long intervals, a solitary, wraithlike figure loomed up suddenly in the mist, and melted away just as suddenly. In the damp, unnatural veil the human form appeared out of proportion, grotesque.

So, also, did the long, gray mass that comprised the National Museum. Over-

hung by the deep fog, it melted into it gradually, taking the sharpness off its corners and rounding them off vaguely into a tenebrous half-tone.

Although all the windows of the museum were closed, the fog seemed to penetrate. Deep and overhanging gloom filled the long, stately corridors and the corners of the big exhibition rooms, dispelled but feebly by the single overhead light in each subdivision.

Peopled by ghosts of a long-dead past the corners seemed, with their velvet shadows, the edges of which moved gently to and fro, now deepening, now narrowing, in accord with the gentle swinging of the hanging light. In the gray mist, which was, in fact, more impenetrable than downright and honest darkness, it was a time when it seemed that the dead were alive and the living dead.

In the center of the room loomed the massive sarcophagus of a five-thousand-year-dead Egyptian princess of the blood of the Pharaohs, her wizen, mummy face animated by a fixed, ghastly smile that seemed to see in eternity something that is not given to us to see in life. Snakelike shone the gleaming limbs of the marble warriors locked in their eternal death embrace at the left of the room, and the shining steel of a crusader's helmet and coat of mail loomed up to a superhuman height and breadth from where the figure stood, mounted on a marble pedestal a foot off the floor, near the right center.

Through it all the watchman of the subdivision moved sleepily, oblivious, through long habit, to what would have been to any one else a ghostly, creepy atmosphere.

"Bli' me," he muttered, "it's a close night, so it is." Slower and slower his steps lagged, and finally he stopped altogether in front of the tall, armored figure of the crusader. With his back to the steel-clad warrior, he stood and mopped his steaming brow with a red handkerchief.

Silently and impressively the right arm of the crusader went up into the air and was suspended for an instant at the apex of its reach, the light gleaming in a sickly high light on the shining steel of the armor. Swiftly the heavy steel gauntlet came down with a dull impact on the unprotected and utterly unknowing head of the guardian of the first floor subdivision of the treasures of the empire.

Without a sound the figure of the watchman whirled dazedly for a short instant, then crumbled up on the floor in a curious, grotesque heap.

The crusader clanked down from the pedestal.

London laughed and gasped in the same breath the next morning. If a giant hand had lifted Threadneedle Street and placed it in the heart of Whitechapel, somewhere, greater astonishment could scarcely have been produced.

You who know all about art know, of course, how rare and expensive a real Rembrandt is. And when you consider that the "Melancholia" was the best picture Rembrandt ever painted, and that it had been in the museum for so long that it had come to be looked upon with the same air of permanence as the foundations of the place or the monocle that reposed in the left eye of Sir Peter McGilligan from time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary—as the legal sharks delicately phrase it—why, then, you have a faint glimmer of the astonishment that was caused at its sudden taking off.

A neat job of fancy burgling it was, too. There was nothing left in the frame but a narrow, half-inch strip of canvas all around. Any one with half an eye could see that the thing had been done leisurely, with none of the appearance or evidences of haste that such a job would presuppose. This was no amateur performance, and showed that the genius who did it knew well the value of the picture. Nothing else in the museum was touched.

As for the "Melancholia"—nobody had ever placed a valuation on her because she belonged in the museum, the bourne from which no treasures were ever sold—but a year before the "Lady with Pink," by Rembrandt, had sold to a rich American for three hundred thousand—count 'em—dollars; and this "Lady" was considered inferior to the "Melancholia." So there you are—a profitable undertaking.

"All I knows is," confided the watchman, "that something jolly well bashed me on th' bean," and he was wont to rub the top of his head with sad reminiscence. Privately, he was of the opinion that it had not been a sporting thing to do; but, being a Briton, he said nothing about it, except to call attention to the fact that his back had been turned—"Bli' me!"

And if the watchman's reminiscences of that night did not lead investigators far, neither did their own investigations, which, you may be sure, were conducted with thoroughness and despatch. The armor-clad figure of the crusader had been repaired and mounted in their own repair room, which adjoined the museum, and moved into the museum proper that morning.

That was as much as they knew. Further than that, they could only conjecture. Evidently it had not been very hard for the thief to slip in during the night—perhaps two came in, one to don the steel and the other to assist in replacing him on the pedestal. That was all, except that the watchman had an awful headache.

II.

Now it came to pass that a fierce longing manifested itself in the heart of Percival Sanderson for possession of the hand of Angelica Vanderveer.

"No," said Angelica Vanderveer, gently but rather firmly.

Percy looked at her, somewhat irritated. He was not used to hearing the word, and it did not ring pleasantly in his aristocratic ears.

"Er—no?" he inquired politely. "Oh, I say, you don't mean that, old scout," he protested.

"Don't call me old scout," she snapped. "How many times do I have to tell you that? Do you understand 'no' when you hear it?"

"No," answered Percy; "and, furthermore, I don't think you mean it as badly as all that. What's the trouble now, Angel?" He lapsed into his casually confidential manner. "You know, you've never given me cause—"

"I know I haven't, but I'm doing so now," she replied decidedly, but Percy's quick ear discerned—or thought it did—a little less firmness in her manner. He gazed at her pleasantly.

"I've been thinking—" she went on.

"Don't," he broke in languidly. "You're not used to it."

"Don't interrupt me," she snapped. "I've been thinking that you're not an awful lot of good in this world, Percival," she said in her primmest manner.

Percy acquiesced good-humoredly. "I know it," he drawled. "What of it?"

"The trouble with you is," she continued, unheeding of his question, "you have altogether more money than is good for you. You have no purpose in the world—you're not going anywhere, if you get what I mean. You're not good for much—"

"Oh, I say," he broke in, protesting. "I guess you forget that I play about the best golf of any one in these parts. Yesterday I busted eighty at Rivergreen. I want to call your particular attention to the way I handle my driver—"

"Oh, rot!" she cut him off. "I mean something real — something that will get you somewhere—work!"

A violent pain broke out at once in all parts of Percy. Why did people persist in speaking on that subject to him, when they knew how unpleasant it was?

"I wish you wouldn't mention that matter to me, Angel," he protested. "I am peculiarly sensitive on the subject—it is a delicate one with me and—"

"Oh, quit your joking," she said sharply, and he was silent. "That's the real trouble I find with you—you refuse to take anything seriously; you make a joke of everything. You ask me to marry you—and when I attempt to show you a way to do it—"

"You show me a way to do it?" echoed Percy. "When—"

"By going to work and trying to appear as if you belong somewhere in this world," she continued, "you make a joke of it." She was thoroughly aroused by now, and it made her loveliness more pronounced. The roses came and went unbidden in her cheeks, and her eyes had a fine fire in them that warmed Percy's heart again.

"Oh, I say, old thing, you certainly look stunning when you're sore," he said.

"You see," she went on again, "you can't even take *me* seriously now — when you've just asked me to marry you. How can I hope that you would do so—afterward?" She was silent, and so was he.

"I'm sorry," he said at length. "I didn't mean to be rude." She was still silent.

A mighty resolve formed itself in the soul of Percy. He would go to work! He would show this woman that he could make the supreme sacrifice for her.

"Show me a job!" announced Percy. "I'm going to work!"

She looked up at him with a light in her eyes that steeled his soul against all the hardships of the business world, the world of work.

"Oh, Percy!" she breathed softly.

The rest of this interview is none of your business. The matter is merely cited by way of explanation to you as to why Percival Sanderson came to be a plain-clothes customs inspector in the employ of the city of New York.

And he made a good one, too, don't make any mistake about that. The main trouble with Percy was that no one had ever graphically pointed out to him the pleasure of being occupied. He had been interested in doing nothing, and had gone into it with thoroughness, so that he had become an expert at it, and was able to do a really artistic job of laziness. Now that he had been aimed in an opposite direction, he took that up with the same thoroughness that he had shown toward idleness, and the results were quite as good.

III.

Galbraith Nichols, collector of customs of the port of New York, stared intently at a spot on the opposite wall, the while he fingered a sheaf of cablegrams. He was a big man, with a funny, red caricature of an apoplectic face, a head that was so bald that it could have been combed with his hat fixed firmly thereon, an incredibly big, round figure, and an inherent hatred for newspapers. His dislike for the daily arbiters of our lives dated back to the time when the leading yellow journal of his fair city had published a picture of him, entitled: "Reading from left to right, Galbraith Nichols."

His eyes, however, gave the lie to everything you might think of the man at a first glance. They were black, deep, and intelligent; eyes that gave the impression of two deep, velvet caves set in the surrounding red. They were inscrutable at times—when necessary—but they were merely troubled now. The newspapers weren't very kind to him those days—there was too much getting by, and he knew it better than they did, though they did not hesitate to tell him many plain and utterly unvarnished truths about himself in unmistakable black type.

And the cablegrams— He pressed a convenient button tentatively, and shuffled the cablegrams again. An office-boy glided into the room.

"Tell Mr. Nesmith I want to see him," he boomed at the kid, who slid out again on the instant. The chief inspector answered the summons in a few moments.

"Sit down." Nichols nodded to a chair, in response to the chief's question.

The collector of the port proceeded directly to the point. "Do you remember the 'Melancholia' being stolen from the British Museum?" he asked abruptly.

"You mean the one in which the watchman was popped on the dome by a statue?" asked the chief. That had been six months before.

"Yes, that's the case," answered Nichols. "There was never any trace of it in England—sort of a blind-alley case, remember?"

"Yep. What about it?"

"It's coming here, that's all," announced Nichols.

"Here!" echoed the chief. "Why, what good would it do here? He'd never be able to dispose—"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, Nesmith, snap out of it!" exploded the collector. "You know as well as I do that there are any number of collectors here who would pay any price for it—to get it into their private collections—where it would never be

found until it was too late to ever get it back."

"Well—"

"Well nothing!" cut in Nichols explosively. "It's coming on the Raritania, which docks to-morrow." He handed over the sheaf of cablegrams. "They're from the London office. They found out about it too late to stop it at their end—but they seem to be sure that Rollinson is bringing it."

"Rollinson, eh?" murmured the chief, and there was a troubled look on his face as he glanced over the cablegrams. "H-m! It won't be the first time," he said softly.

"No, it won't," acquiesced the collector. "But it's got to be the last." He leaned across the plate-glass top of his desk, and his red face was redder than ever.

"Nesmith, we must get him this time!" He said this slowly, and with emphasis.

"If he ever gets by again—" began Nesmith slowly.

"If he gets by — you'll be giving the want ads the once over — and so will I."

"I got you," answered the chief inspector succinctly.

"All right; I'll depend upon you."

Nesmith turned at the door. "If it's there, I'll get it," he announced. "You can tell the cock-eyed world," with which inelegant promise he banged the door on his way out.

It was not the first time they had run across the trail of Rollinson. He had been a thorn in their sides for long. He posed as a picture dealer—and he was. They knew he had brought pictures in with him on which he never troubled to go through the formality of paying duty, but they had never managed to get the goods on him. He was devilishly clever, was Rollinson.

Rollinson stood by a great heap of luggage, under the section marked with a big "R," and consumed a cigarette while he watched the eddying crowd. It came his turn at last.

"Anything to declare?" the inspector asked—the usual question.

"Nothing but what I'm wearing," answered Rollinson.

"Anything in your trunk?"

"I have no trunk," he answered. "Everything I've got with me is in that suit-case." He pointed at an ordinary suit-case with his stick. "You see, I'm going right back on this boat," he explained. "Just ran over on a little business."

The inspector—it was Nesmith himself—looked the contents of the suit-case over carefully, although he knew he would not be rewarded with any success.

"Are you sure you have nothing to declare?" he asked again, curtly.

"My word!" Rollinson curled the end of his mustache irritably. "I told you no a moment ago."

Nesmith bit his lip in vexation. Rollinson was the last one to be examined—and nobody had got by without an exhaustive examination this trip. And yet—that picture— There was positive information—

"All right," he conceded at length, and Rollinson turned to go.

Galbraith Nichols, collector of the port, stared in silent irritation at Nesmith, who stared back at him just as irritably. The latter broke the silence just before it became awkward.

"That picture never went through the gate," he said. "Are you sure of your infor—"

"For the tenth time—yes," rasped the collector. "And we've got to get it! Or they'll get us. What else have you done on it?"

"Well, I've got Sanderson on the job, for one thing. We're going to know everything the old duck does until he boards the boat again on his way out. You say the boys on the boat couldn't get any dope on him?"

"Not a thing," nodded the collector. "Went through his stateroom, and all."

IV.

SANDERSON was on the job. During the next three days Rollinson made the round of the picture-dealers — the big ones. It was the usual business trip that a picture-dealer makes—he bought a picture or two, and contracted for others that he was to send over. Percy Sanderson made the

rounds, too, but got nothing much for his pains besides a contempt for pictures of all kinds and an abounding dislike for picture-dealers.

On the evening of the fourth day all hands had about given up hope of getting anywhere on the case. The boat was to leave at nine o'clock, and at seven Rollinson was already on board and in his stateroom—he had reserved the same stateroom in which he had come over.

Percy hung around near the gangplank, and smoked a cigarette. He had no practical purpose in hanging around—his job on this case was finished, to all intents and purpose. All that was left was to hand in his expense account.

Two young men, decidedly English in appearance, strolled down to the gangplank. One of them limped badly. A careless glance from Percy disclosed the ribbon of the Croix de Guerre attached to the lapel of the limping Englishman.

"He got something besides his war cross to show for that rumpus," muttered Percy, glancing at his leg, but it was the other man upon whom his attention centered. He had seen him before—several times. His memory was good. Twice he had seen the man in the company of Rollinson as they made the round of the picture-dealers.

They stopped and asked a question of the official at the gangplank before proceeding up. He nodded, and they disappeared into the boat.

"What did they say?" asked Percy, drawing near.

"Wanted to know if they could visit a passenger before he left," answered the official.

"Did they give his name?" asked Percy.

"No."

Percy withdrew to the shadow of a pile of shipping that cast a grateful gloom over a corner near the gangplank. He smoked many cigarettes. He also lapsed into a reverie that had to do with a certain girl, yclept Angelica, and that ran on to profane thoughts concerning fathers who were not very keen about the union, in particular the father that belonged to Angelica. He smoked more cigarettes.

He was awakened from his reverie by the figure of a limping man making his way haltingly down the gangplank. Percy recognized him as one of the pair who had made their way up that same gangplank a while before. Now he regarded him more intently.

"Now, why," said Percy to himself, "should a man who limped with the right leg on boarding this boat, limp with his left leg upon going ashore?" He engaged in profound contemplation of this strange fact for a moment. Decisions came quickly to Percy those days.

He detached himself from the shadow of the shipping, entered quickly upon another long shadow that ran down the side of the pier, and followed.

Several blocks away the lame man got on a street-car that was making its way up-town. So did Percy; he stayed on the rear platform, where he could see without being seen. On the way up-town the scheme unfolded itself suddenly to Percy, just as a book opens accidentally at the proper page. It just came to him, and he almost had to laugh at the sheer simplicity of it. It was this very simplicity, Percy reflected, that nearly put it over, too.

It ran about like this, as Percy doped it out. Of course, Rollinson wouldn't try to land the picture himself, knowing that they were on the lookout. That would be the height of asininity. And yet the picture was there, Percy was convinced. He had engaged return passage on the same boat and—as they knew—had taken the same stateroom. Following out that line of reasoning, once his suspicion had been awakened, it followed that the picture was somewhere in that stateroom.

Just before leaving, Rollinson had visitors. Now, as Percy ruminated, when a boat docks, the passengers are examined. But who examines visitors who go upon a ship to say good-by and leave said ship just before she pulls out?

"Nobody!" he decided.

Therefore, what was to prevent a visitor from going off with the picture?

"Nothing!" he decided again.

"That is," he continued, "nothing but me, Perc."

And the man limped because he had a rolled-up picture neatly inserted in the leg of the trouser. A well-thought-out plan—if he had only remembered which was the game leg.

The limper rose to leave the car at this point. Percy got off before him, and walked slowly across the street. The young man descended from the car and headed for a dingy side-street. Percy immediately became one with the shadows, and followed.

Into the basement door of a disreputable-looking boarding-house limped the man. Percy noticed that he used no key. A moment later he was through the doorway himself. All was dark inside. He heard him going up the stairs—first one flight, and then another. Through the space between the railing of the two flights of stairs a light flared out from a room at the head of the second flight.

Silently Percy went up. At the head of the second flight he paused for a moment. He could see his quarry now, moving about the room, his back to the open door. Percy went in.

"Don't make any sudden moves, old dear," he cautioned quietly, and the young Englishman turned to face the blue muzzle of an automatic .45, an ugly weapon, effective from either end.

"Oh, you're heah!" remarked the Englishman calmly. "And what can I do for—"

"Why, I think I'm going to ask you to undress, my son."

"Awsk me to undress? My word!" echoed the Englishman.

"Yeh," drawled Percy. "It's a very curious case. Science will be greatly interested in—"

"I say! Would you mind pointing that bloomin' cannon a little off to the side? I dare say it's loaded and—"

"Interested in learning," went on Percy, undisturbed, "how a disease can hop from one leg to the other simply by going upon an ocean-liner and landing therefrom."

"Oh, I see," smiled the other; "you want to know what I've got attached to my leg."

Percy nodded. "Yes, I'd like to. Personally, I think it's the 'Melancholia.'" He looked at the Englishman significantly. "Don't you think so?" he asked.

"See for yourself," the answer came. "Here it is." He reached down, fumbled with some strings, and drew forth a rolled-up paper which was about thirty-six inches in length.

With one hand Percy snapped the roll open.

It was nothing but a blank sheet of paper.

From the noisome, dark regions of the house below them a tinny piano sounded forth, and a raucous feminine voice blared forth, "When You Come to the End of a Perfect Day." Percy smiled grimly.

"You see," smiled the Englishman, "your reasoning was perfectly good except—"

"Except," finished Percy, "that this is not the picture."

"What picture?" inquired the other politely.

"You know very well what picture," snapped Percy. "I think I'll take you along with me. There are ways—"

"You have nothing on me," he put in.

"I haven't?" echoed Percy. "It's a plain open-and-shut case. Rollinson hides picture in his cabin—visitor goes aboard to see him off—brings picture with him—nobody thinks of searching visitor—he limps, giving the thing away—"

"Almost," smiled the Englishman once more, a slow, exasperating smile. "That would be too easy. Tell me," he inquired suddenly, "did you ever stand in one position inside of a suit of armor for seventeen hours, waiting for a watchman to halt in front of you—but of course you didn't. And then to give it away by limping with the wrong foot—"

It came to Percy in a flash. He had been perfectly right. The picture was aboard the boat, and a visitor had brought it off—of that he was certain—*but not this visitor*.

He remembered suddenly that there had been two—and only one had emerged. And this business of limping with the wrong leg—that had been a plant to draw him off on a false trail.

"I see," he broke into the other's speech. "The picture did come off that boat—but it was the other fellow who brought it."

"He knows altogether too much, doesn't he?" remarked the Englishman. "I think you had bettah bash him one on his blooming top piece," he remarked to some one behind Percy. Percy flashed a quick look backward, but he was a fraction of a second late.

Instantly the dingy little room became deluged with a bright, midday sun, the birds sang on the boughs for Percy, and the flowers bloomed—or perhaps the flowers sang and the birds bloomed—it was all one to him. He rested quietly in an awkward heap.

Figures moved before Percival Sanderson in a misty, disconnected dream just before he came through to a dazed consciousness. There were loud rumblings from a noisy street, and it seemed that a multitude of figures moved before and around him. A number ran through his coma—"5533 Fifth Avenue" seemed to go seeping through the brain of Percy over and over again. He remembered mumbling to himself: "A full house—three fives and a pair of trays"—then a sharp, sibilant whisper of warning came back disconnectedly to him, and a door closed.

It was the closing of the door that finally awakened him to a real consciousness. He stretched his limbs, and his fingers came in contact with his automatic. They had not bothered to take it, he reflected. He had a splitting headache, and could not think straight, but a number was running through his head—5533 Fifth—5533 Fifth—

Finally it began to take form. It was the address of Angelica. It came to him that he was thinking of this girl even in his misty coma.

"Not a bad hunch," he decided. "Guess I'd better close up for the night and call on the dear old girl."

Angelica looked at him in words of one syllable as he stood before her, hair dishevelled, a spot of blood above his left ear, and face in which the pallor was just about beginning to be replaced by the healthy color of anger.

"I always knew," she said, "that no good could come of your going to work, Percy," she said.

He told her his story, also in words of one syllable.

"You see what comes of your strange passion for manual labor," he explained to her in conclusion. "I get snuffed out like a light—by a perfect stranger to me, Angel, my own. I hope that by now your insane delusion that work is good for—"

She put her arms around his neck and choked off the words.

"Where's your father?" he said finally.

"I don't know; in the gallery, I guess," she said. "What do you want him for?"

"Oh, I would converse with him—concerning matrimony, mostly."

She looked at him understandingly.

"Let's go," she said.

John D. Vanderveer stood in his gallery, and the "Melancholia," which was unrolled on the table before him, stared back at him with her famous, inscrutable smile—the smile that seemed to tell of a knowledge of the hearts of men and of what she had found there. With Vanderveer were two men—one was a slight Englishman and the other a thick-set, bearded man with eyes that glowed sinisterly from his hairy countenance.

"But the price of—" started Vanderveer.

"The price!" broke in the Englishman contemptuously. "You cahn't consider price when you talk of a Rembrahndt. The lahst price—sale price—was sixty thousand pounds—three hundred thousand dollahs in youah bloomin' money."

Outside the door, which was slightly ajar, Percy had paused for a moment with Angelica.

"So I shall leave the government flat on its back," he was saying, "and go back to a life of—" Suddenly the voices inside the room came to him, and he stopped stark still. He looked through the crack in the door.

"Pardon me one moment, Angelica, old thing," he said politely, taking out that automatic again.

He opened the door very quietly and went in.

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

YOU will find at the end of this department an announcement of the ONE HUNDREDTH ALL-STORY serial to be published in book form. We wonder if our readers fully appreciate just what this means—that it is a most unusual record—a quite unique record, in fact? We wonder if you realize that, in the somewhat less than fourteen years the ALL-STORY has been in existence, for an expenditure of one dollar a year for the monthly and four dollars a year for the weekly—a total of less than thirty-six dollars—you have received, besides many hundreds of other good serials and novelettes and *thousands* of short stories and poems, *one hundred novels* that have been deemed worthy of permanent covers, most of them highly popular, many of them best sellers, which if purchased in their book form would have cost you from one hundred and thirty-five dollars to one hundred and fifty dollars for the one hundred novels *alone*.

Besides all this, you have got, in the ALL-STORY, the first version of many a famous feature film drama, and not a few successful stage productions. It is a point worth noting, too, that each year has seen an increase in the number of ALL-STORY serials that have attained the dignity—received the accolade—of book production, and you may be sure that it is our intention to see that this yearly increase continues in the future in accelerated progression.

* * *

OF course you've heard that old jingle that runs:

Needles and pins, needles and pins,
When a man marries his trouble begins.

The man who wrote those lines knew what he was talking about. From the instant the once gay and care-free bachelor hears pronounced those solemn words that make a man one with a woman, and her mother and her sisters and her cousins and her uncles and her aunts, to say nothing of the old servant of the family who "remembers her when she was a baby," and goes into embarrassing and quite unnecessary details—pardon us, please. What we started to say was that from the instant the happy bridegroom hears those sweetly solemn words that endow him with a blushing bride, and her flat-faced Pomeranian, and her sixteen hat-boxes, and a growing respect for time tables, and care as to little personal habits like emptying his pipe on the rugs, and the privilege of paying long and fully itemized bills for garments—of varying degrees of intimacy—for feminine apparel and—pardon us again. What we've been trying to say is just what the old jingle says, and the advice we offer is that contained in the title of the screamingly funny five-part serial that starts in next week's issue—

DON'T EVER MARRY

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN

Author of "His Word of Honor," "Dodd—His Diary," "Ready to Occupy," etc.

If you have read Edgar Franklin's other stories, you know that he has never been guilty of writing a dull page. He is a real genius in getting his characters into embarrassing and mirth-provoking situations—and of getting them out and into situations even more embarrassing and mirth provoking.

A Franklin story starts with a chuckle, produces a broad grin before you've read a page, has you laughing out loud at the end of the first chapter, and keeps on getting funnier and funnier until the end. To our mind "DON'T EVER MARRY" has as many smiles per thousand words as anything ever written. If you don't want to laugh, don't read it.

THAT astounding miracle of the imagination, "The Girl in the Golden Atom," definitely placed the author in the forefront of ALL-STORY WEEKLY writers. Many of our authors have to serve a long and arduous discipline before their work entitles them to this distinction. But Ray Cummings with his first story passed into the class of distinguished service men. The reason is not far to seek. He struck a new note in fiction, which readers were quick to appraise and appreciate. Hundreds of letters in this office testify to the reading public's spontaneous enthusiasm for the daring reach of this writer's fancy, in a field where he is a pioneer. That he is no rushlight, no false alarm, is demonstrated anew in a characteristic novelette in next week's magazine—

THE OTHER MAN'S BLOOD

BY RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Girl in the Golden Atom"

Science has been busy for more than twoscore years investigating the problem of thought transference. No one disputes the facts, though there is a wide variety of hypotheses to account for them. Spiritualism and psychic phenomena are at the moment the battle-ground where the leaders of both sides are arrayed against one another. Our author advances in dramatic form a new theory to account for a strange and startling phenomenon. Whatever you may think of his theory on its scientific side, you will find his story irresistible and his hypothesis as interesting as it is ingenious.

GENIUS is said to be akin to madness; yet all men who are a little mad are not geniuses. At the top of the list of next week's short stories is the tale of a man who wanted to be an artist—a writer. His failure embittered his life; at last he produced an artistic masterpiece—although of a sort not often considered by those who use that term—and it led to his downfall. You will agree with us that

A WORK OF ART

BY LEONARD L. HESS

(A "Different" Story)

is a story quite worthy of its title, although the title does not refer to the story. It is a grim tale of a man with an abnormal brain and a warped outlook on life; a nocturne of the dim places of the human soul, done in somber colors, but beautifully. And in addition to its high artistic value, it is a story that holds the reader's attention from start to finish.

ANOTHER first-class story is "HEAVEN FOR HORSE THIEVES," by Clay Perry, another of his fine tales of the big woods and the lumbermen who work in them. Mr. Perry says that there are two kinds of horse thieves—the kind who steal horses for the sake of the money they can obtain by their sale, and the kind who steal them because they love them and want to keep them. "Big Timber Joe," the most important character in next week's story, loved horses, but he also had another reason for wanting to own a team—a reason that to him seemed so important that he made off with two beautiful grays belonging to his employers. What happened after that you will learn from the story—and it's mighty interesting reading.

FEW writers have the knack of story-telling more fully developed than has Charles Wesley Sanders. Stories of all sorts—railroading, shipping on the Great Lakes, detective yarns, small-town life and business—flow from his industrious pen swiftly and easily, every one of them with a quality of simple directness in writing and keen observation and care in character-drawing that makes them entertaining reading. In the next issue you will find another of his small-town tales —"THE END OF HIS STRING." It is quite up to the Sanders standard—and that is high praise indeed!

WE have never ventured beyond the fringe of the Ohio oil-fields, but we are ready to believe old Pete Skidmore, who put the matter in a capsule when he said, "Any damn thing at all can happen in the oil game—and usually does!" How big the thing was that happened down in Texas to Nobby West, Robert J. Horton will tell you in next week's magazine in his entrancing little story, "$1,000,000 WORTH OF SENTIMENT."

"THEY WERE SEVEN" A REAL PLEASURE

TO THE EDITOR:

I am sending this to thank you for "They Were Seven," but mostly to tell you how I appreciate the author. He has found that subtle something so often lacking—the power of description that reaches the emotions while portraying vividly the scenes. His story, while not entirely new as to theme, has made my heart leap and tears come unbidden while the mind pictured the beautiful woman with the "silver hair and tawny eyes." To do *this* takes a power beyond the average story-teller, for I have long passed the "teens" and their romantic imaginings.

I have seen and lived in the illusions of the very young, and have seen those illusions vaporize in the sterner walks of life; yet, in spite of all that, there was a strong, very strong call upon emotions I thought long dead, and a desire to once more mingle with the strength of youth and the zest of living among those who help make this old world a glory-spot for us all.

Thank George Gilbert for me; thank him for giving a real pleasure and rekindling the incentive to make life worth living; a pleasure to those with whom I may come in contact as well as myself. I fear I have tired you with this, but it is true; and you deserve thanks also for bringing back to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY an allegiance that was waning. WILDER H. WALTERS.

Lincoln, Nebraska.

"CHARACTERS MUST BE REAL"

TO THE EDITOR:

I have just finished reading the August 16 number of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and I feel that I must say a few words about the stories. I don't know how "The Queen of Life" may have appealed to others, but to me it was a very funny story! I laughed until I cried when *Estra* said to *Billie:* "I'm not what you thought! I'm not a man, I'm a woman!" I think Flint's stories should be classed as "different" stories, too. I like "different" stories. I wish Merritt would tell us some more about *Larry* and *Lakla.* I don't care where the story is written of—north, south, east or west—if the characters seem real; if I can feel as though they were some one I know, I like the story. I'm very glad to meet *Koyala* and *Peter Gross* again in "A Daughter of Borneo." I like all the stories I have ever read in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, except a very few war stories and the stories by Edgar Franklin. You will find enclosed one dollar, for which please send the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months to a satisfied reader, LYN B. ADAMS.

Morristown, Tennessee.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

I am a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and think it is fine. I was in Missouri for three months, and I didn't miss it once. I would like a sequel to "The Untamed" and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool," and more of "The Mouthpiece of Zitu." What is the matter with Max Brand and E. K. Means? Success to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. MAURICE KELLER.

Des Moines, Iowa.

I have just finished reading "Misery Mansions," and want to say it was one of the best stories I have had the pleasure of reading for some time; and its ending was sad, but correct, as *Paul* and *Lydia* could not have married and lived "happily ever after," as she did not love him more than self; therefore would have made one of his disposition discontented, as *his* people would be pulling him one way and she another. Mr. Gibbs is a new writer for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, is he not? If so, do not let him escape. "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" was fine; so was "From Now On." "The Grouch" was dandy. I see a number of readers are always looking for sequels. Why?. Sequels sometimes spoil a good story. Take "The Untamed"; *Dan* could not be tied to apron strings, and that is about what it would amount to. So let him roam. With best wishes to the authors and the editor of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. MRS. E. MCDERMOTT.

New York City.

THIS IS THE 100th ALL-STORY WEEKLY SERIAL TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM

YELLOW MEN SLEEP

BY JEREMY LANE

THIS is a first novel, yet it is written with a skill and knowledge of life that many a man grown old in the literary world will envy. It is an exciting tale; a tale of adventure and high emprise in an almost unknown region of China, and it takes you from ultramodern America into the heart of a civilization thousands of years older than ours. Robert Louis Stevenson once said that there were two kinds of adventure stories—the crude, lurid tale that depends wholly on incident to hold the interest, and the story in which the skill of the writer weaves a tale so engrossing that the reader forgets where he is; even loses his own personality, and pushing the hero aside, takes his place and plunges into entrancing adventures. This story is the latter kind, and while you read, you will be able to see the vast stretches of lonely plains over which *Con Levington* fights his painful way; to feel the dust of the desert in your face; to look upon the teeming life of Eastern ports, while ever leading you on is the solution of the strange mystery that took *Levington* to China. Real characters, crowding incident, vivid color—the story has everything that a great adventure should have. (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, May 3 to 31, 1919. Under the title "The Fragrant Web.")

Published in book form by the Century Co., New York, 1919. Price $1.60.

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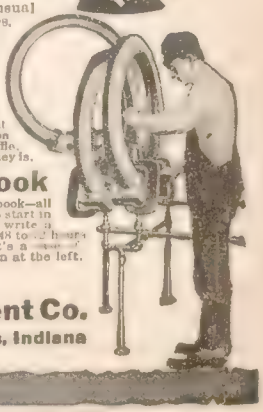

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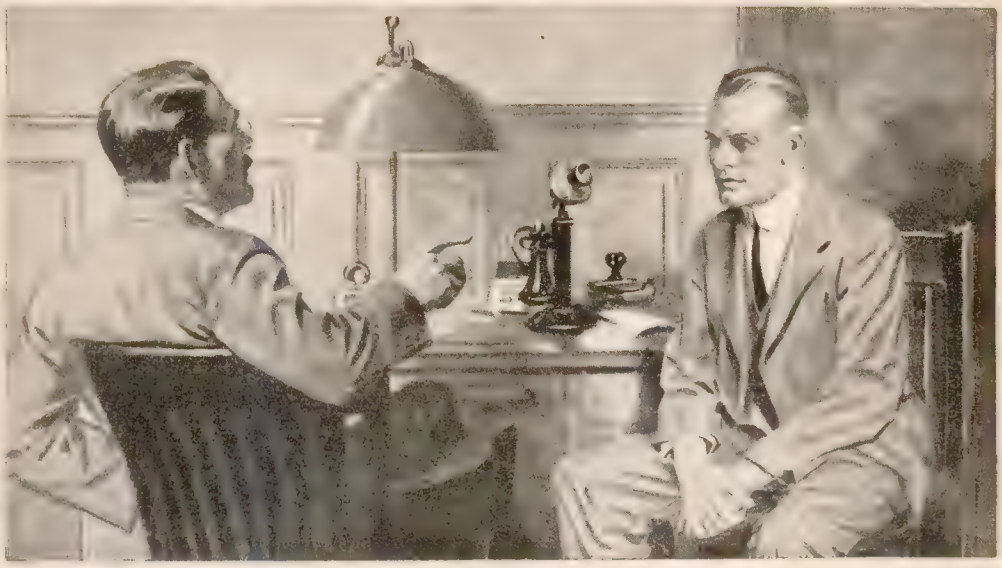

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"For a long time I watched the new men who came into this business. Some stood still—stayed right where they started. Others climbed—made each job a stepping stone to something better.

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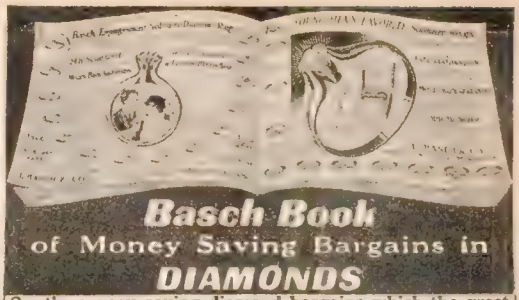

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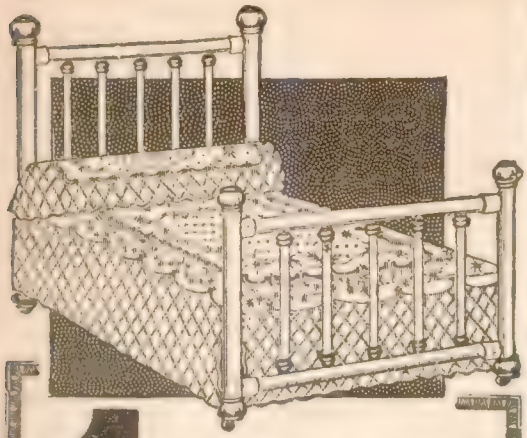

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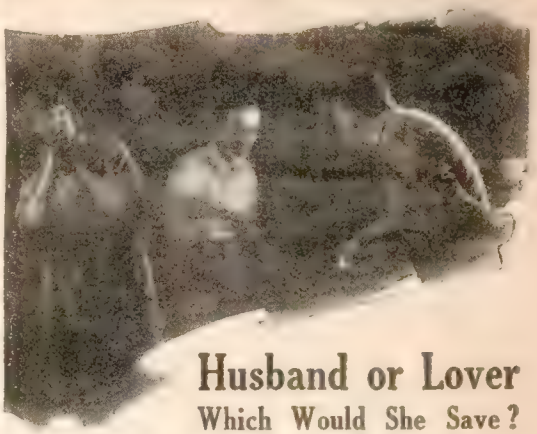

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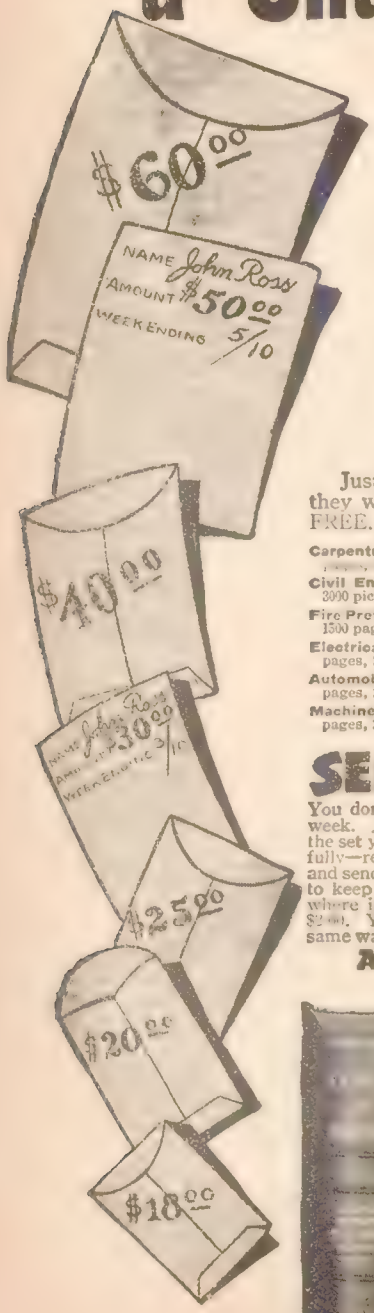

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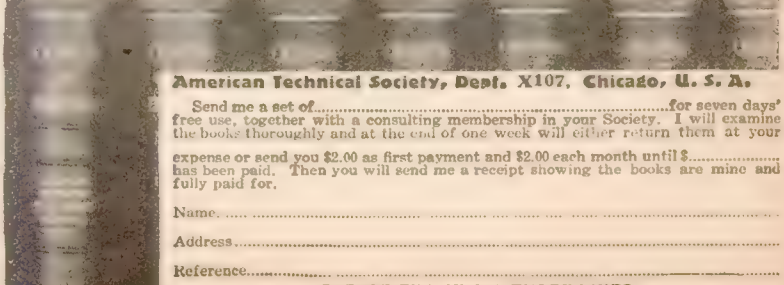

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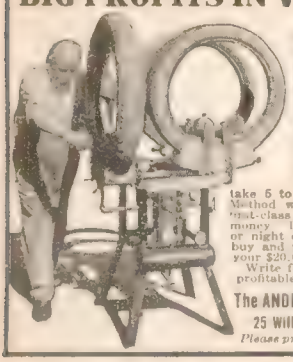

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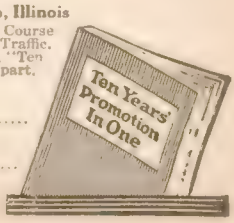

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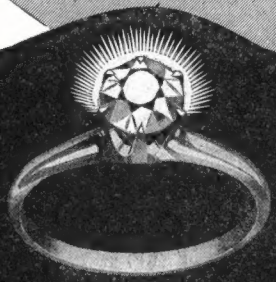

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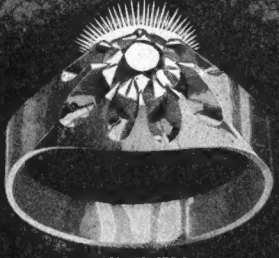

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